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TO
THE SISTERS OF THE HOLY NATIVITY
IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT
OF UNFAILING KINDNESS

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I

SAINT MARY OF THE HILLS

Saint Mary of the Hills lifts the top of its bell-tower up above the pines and looks out over their heads and down into the valley where the river runs crookedly through fields which to-day are just showing the touch of green that cries to us on the hill-top that Spring is coming. A long, low, gray building is our Convent, set against a hill-side where it so blends with the granite out-crop that it seems but a larger boulder among the pines. Back of it the hill slopes up to a plateau where a little pond lies among pines and birches that look down at their own faces in the still dark water — that water which to-day is, in the quiet March air, like a plate of polished gun-metal. Looking south from our hill, which drops abruptly several hundred feet, there is a valley spread out, a valley thick-set with farmsteads, with spreading meadows and

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dark plowed fields, with groves of oak and maple. East and West, ranges of hills, growing higher and higher till we begin to call them mountains, shut in our valley; but to the south it has no end but the line of the horizon.

It is through a break in the hills westward that the river comes dashing down as though it were going to rush across the plain, and then pauses, perhaps astonished at the blaze of sunshine and the flatness of the meadows, and then flows on languidly between banks where willows, now growing bright and yellow, dip the tips of their fingers in the water as though to test its cold. It is such a change for the river from the narrow ravine down which it had dashed in wild glee over stones and rotting tree trunks, where spreading hemlocks stretched their thick branches over it, keeping out the sun, save for little yellow and white rays which dodged down between the twigs when the breeze swayed them, and danced and laughed upon the surface of the water which laughed back at them as it rippled on. We call it a river as it goes out through the plain, though I feel the name is a little too pretentious for

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it. I always think of it as a brook, but I try not to say so, because the folk who live on its bank would resent it as a depreciation of their stream. And sometimes in early Spring when the snow melts quickly it runs over its low banks and spreads out on the meadows and, for a few days, justifies its name.

Looking out from my window in the round tower over the chapel, what delights me most is the sky, the clouds, the play of light on the world which lies at my feet. The infinite variety of the sky! Though one looks out at intervals of but a few moments, it is always a different sky that one sees, save, it may be, on those days when there is but a vast field of blue with no clouds at all: and even that subtly changes in tone from hour to hour as the position of the sun alters. But we are rarely without clouds up here on the hill-top. Now it is a great mass of cloud which settles down and takes possession of us and wraps us up in its wet folds and blots out all the landscape, even the pines and birches out there on the edge of the pond, and changes our valley into a white tossing sea. I love that, too. I love the dim shapes

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of trees just visible through white mists. I love the hours when the mist clears from us and lets us have the sun back — the sun which now plays on the top of the cloud that fills the valley. Then there are still clear mornings after storm, when there are just wisps of cloud up here — when one may see, it may be, just one little cloud, sitting, impertinently, in Sister Etheldred's garden, as though in defiance of the sun.

But our normal days are days of mixed cloud and sunshine, when the wind takes the clouds and tosses them about, and twists them into marvelous shapes. They scurry about as though they were playing some wonderful game; and as they run, attendant shadows run over the slopes of the hills and dash across the floor of the valley. Then are there marvels of changing light. On still mornings the hills and valleys are purple with the purple of kings; but in the evening the purple changes wonderfully to rose — soft pink light lies on all the landscape and veils the hills. But when the sun and the clouds contend for mastery we have an ever-changing drama set out before us: the sun gaining the victory tears ragged holes in the clouds

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and pours cataracts of golden, or sometimes of blue, light down on the meadows and lowlands. Then the clouds rush in and fill the holes and the sun, defeated there, goes elsewhere and breaks through afresh. I, from my tower, watch the battles for hours, entranced by the wonder of purple cloud and golden light as they war for the possession of the world. Then the bell rings in the tower above me and shakes my room as though to remind me that this is a world where men are held to work.

And all the while one would rather watch the dramatic action which nature sets upon its stage to-day — the strong light of the triumphant sun which has conquered and dispelled the clouds, the exulting power of the young Spring which is becoming very evident. The willows of the stream-bank glow more intensely yellow, little ferns are poking their heads out through the dead leaves, an almost imperceptible flush of green lies over the world. Spring comes with a laugh of triumph, and then with the green and splendor of emerald. Soon birds will sing and flowers will bloom and rich fruitfulness will be everywhere. Spring, the sea-

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son of joy and hope and promise, triumphant over the sterility of Winter — so all the poets read the book of the world.

I wonder if I am alone in that I look out from my tower window upon this triumphant advance of Spring with a touch of regret in my thought. The Winter has been so wonderful. The pines about my tower, singing in the wind, not an effeminate love-song, but the stern Gregorian chant of a consecrated life — the song of the pines blends so harmoniously with the chants that float out to them from the chapel. At this season the oaks and birches show themselves for what they really are. You see the beauty of the tree when its leaves are off — as it stands up, every limb and twig perfectly defined against the green and amber of a twilight sky. There are days of snow, new fallen, when one wanders through the marvelous aisles of the forest; there are cold mornings after rain when you wake up to a world clad in jewels. There are, to me, most beautiful of all, the naked brown days, when the superficial death with which Winter covers the essential life of the world, shows all the marvelously subtle tones of

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brown and gray and red such as no artist on earth can paint them.

Why is the Winter so beautiful? I think it is because it brings to us a sense of the seriousness of the world and life; that we are in fact playing our parts in a marvelous drama the issues of which are eternal. And this drama, with all its stern realism, yet has in it elements of sublimer beauty than anything else that life has to offer. The soldier dances and sings songs and makes love, but all the while he knows that this is a mere interlude, and that his vocation is fulfilled where the guns thunder and men fall dead and mangled in the pursuit of high ideals. So all life has its moments — its necessary moments — of relaxation, of pleasure sought for its own sake. Yet they are but brief. We think scorn of him who attempts to carry the pursuit of pleasure into the business of mature life.

And Spring is but passing youth. Summer is a worldling, relaxed and dissipated, notwithstanding its beauty. Autumn is despairing age pathetically seeking to make itself attractive by the gaudiness of its dress. But Winter is an ascetic. It has rid itself of

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the superfluous. It conquers through the very fact of its nakedness. It is triumphant, like the hermit saint, over a world that it can do without. And because it has so stripped itself of the adventitious, it shows itself as the supreme beauty.

You would have no doubt of this, if you were here on our hill-top — if you could look out on all sides through the windows of my tower. Have you ever seen through the naked branches, ragged and irregular, of an oak, the dull colorless sky of night grow to amber and then to gold and rose, as the sun comes near to his rising? Have you ever watched the sun sink behind cloud banks that change to crimson and show like fields of blood through the swaying branches of pines? Have you ever found the infinity of delicate coloring that is hidden under our sweeping generalization, a brown hillside? No; there is no beauty like the beauty of Winter. Summer is a Sybarite; she attracts the superficial and unthinking with a beauty that is but the beauty of the flesh. Winter is an ascetic, beautiful with the spiritual beauty of a consecrated life.

What is the meaning of it all, of this

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beauty which holds me entranced at my window? Does it begin and end in itself with no message for the soul? Is it a purely material thing — the play of light on atmospheric dust, the chance arrangement of clouds as they drift about the sky? Is the only will concerned in all this shifting scene of light and shade, of manifold color combinations, the wind's will or the sun's? If this rich outpouring of beauty bear no message to my soul, why is my soul stirred? For that it is stirred, that the souls of all human beings are stirred and deeply moved by the splendor of the world, is obvious. They are so universally moved that when men want to move them for any purpose they appeal to the sense of beauty with entire confidence. The advertiser is so certain of the universality of this sense of the beautiful and, what is much to be regretted, that it is so rarely educated to distinguish between the really beautiful and that which is but tawdry, that he makes it the basis of an appeal for attention. Down there in the valley where nature has been so lavish, where in a few weeks she will have displaced her March display of browns with her May

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offering of countless tones of green,—of green brightly jeweled with endlessly varying flowers,—in the midst of all this the advertiser has set up his signboards by the roadside, has covered the rocks with his posters, and makes his appeal on behalf of his cigarettes or his breakfast food in the complete certainty that so elemental is the sense of beauty that the eye of the passer will be caught and his attention fixed long enough to read the announcement displayed. Even if the passer disapprove of the display, the attention would have been held long enough to carry the message to his brain.

Yes; beauty seizes, holds, fixes the attention. If it be beauty of a high order, even if high only relatively to the cultivation of my sense of beauty, it goes very deep into the soul. It is endowed with moving power. We all know how the spiritual nature thrills and is shaken in its presence, with an emotion that is so elemental that we do not find power of expression for it. The impact of the beautiful is so forceful that when it reaches us we are often faint with a physical faintness as the result.

What is the meaning? As I try to ana-

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lyze the impression that was made on me by the rose light of dawn seen brokenly through pine branches as I looked out eastward this morning, and found myself, to use the old word of magic, *spell-bound* by the wonder of it, I find in my experience two strands, so to call them. There is the sense of exaltation, the glad response of my soul to what I saw. I felt an expansion of my spiritual nature which was pure joy. I stood silent, motionless, as the roselight brightened and quivered and then faded as the sun came nearer. We feel the same sensation of fullness of life when we look into the heart of a lily, when some strain of music comes to us, when, as we ride through the country, the odor of clover, of wild grapes, of pine woods comes upon the breeze. A sense of joy flooding one — that is it. But what is this other strand that soon makes itself felt in the experience? What is this feeling of incompleteness, of longing? Life seemed full to the brim, and then the tide recedes. There is an outreach of the soul for something it does not quite grasp. There is a dissatisfaction, not with what we have, but with our failure to grasp that of

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which we feel the pressure. There is more beyond, vastly more than we have; we have got but the edge of an experience that eludes us. The little we have reveals to us the nature of that we have not. It is what, in Biblical phrase, is called "the first fruits" — the part which suggests and guarantees the whole.

You know how chance things bring back experiences that we have had. The smell of hemlock and ground pine always brings back to me a child's joy in trimming a country church for a Christmas festival, opens a gate through which I can go far back into the past of a supremely happy childhood, follow clew upon clew till I lose myself in dreams. Each of us have the like experiences — an odor, the words of a song, a photograph — which open doors ordinarily locked. What this impression of the incompleteness of our vision of beauty would seem to do is to open doors that lead, not back into our past, but out into the infinite. One has the feeling of standing on the edge of the cliff, which is life, and looking out into space and feeling the thrill of power which comes to us from the Beyond.

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This aching sense of our failure to grasp all that is there, means that we cannot translate into terms of everyday life what we nevertheless have the certainty of in our own deep experience. What we are sure of as existing we cannot in any wise picture — we find no means of making it intelligible to others. St. Paul in his vision, rapt up to the third heaven, comes back to earth and cannot at all tell us what he saw and heard, —“ Unspeakable words, which it is not possible for a man to utter.” He declines the attempt. But St. John did not decline it. When heaven was open to him, he found the means to tell us what it is like and his description of it is in terms of beauty — his pages flash and gleam and sparkle with the splendors of the temple of God.

The function of beauty, then, is to lead us to some sort of knowledge of that which is back of beauty, its ground and cause. To speak Christianly, beauty is a revelation of the nature of God. Beauty tells us what that which causes it is like. Every painting in an exhibition, every statue in a gallery, is, first of all, a picture, and image, of the artist's mind. Perhaps the most interesting

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story that any book has to tell is the story of its author. We disregard these self-revelations of artist and author commonly because they are difficult to read, but they are there. Sometimes they press themselves upon us, as when in a time of artistic degeneracy we are compelled to understand the meaning of decadence as the degradation of men's souls.

So nature reveals through its beauty the beauty of its Maker. We have always been taught that the power of the world implied power; that the fact that the world is intelligible implies intelligence as its ground. It ought to have been just as plain to us that its beauty was a revelation of its Maker. Man has always been asking, what is the evidence of the *goodness* of God? What power there is behind Nature is no doubt powerful and intelligent, but how can we know if it be good? Surely, we know through the revelation of beauty, for when you carry beauty to its highest expression it becomes identical with the good. There is nothing more foolish than the modern denial of this — of the assertion that beauty has no moral quality or meaning but is complete in

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itself. On the contrary, while you may have a certain amount and kind of beauty that is not obviously moral, and while you may have a certain sort of hectic beauty which is connected with that which is immoral, in neither case have you supreme beauty. When artists in word or color or form present us with beauty which is set in the immoral situations of life, if the *teaching* of it is immoral, then the beauty is diseased and flawed. Even that supreme beauty of form which is the gift of the Greeks to us is inferior in ultimate expression to the beauty which is not only beauty but goodness.

That is one of the lessons of our Lord's life. "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." That is the merely human vision of Him. But to those who have spiritual vision He presents the supreme type of human beauty — the beauty of goodness, the beauty of God. God, as He makes Himself known, is essential goodness, and therefore essential beauty. Starting from nature we work to perfect beauty which is perfect goodness: starting from the

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perfect goodness of our Lord we work to perfect beauty; from whichever side we work, we come to the feet of God.

Here, in St. Mary of the Hills, we work both ways, because we recognize the identity of the ends the path leads to. We love the beauty of our hills and woods and they inspire us to seek the beauty of life. But the beauty of life that we seek is essentially the stern beauty of the winter hills. We love form and color; our garden is superb with its endless variety of exquisite leaf and flower all through the Spring and Summer. Our service is as much like the service St. John saw in heaven as we can make it: we have there warmth and light and color. But our deep interpretation of life's beauty is found in the long gray line of the convent broken only where the tower shoots heavenward, lifting the cross — the symbol of all life's severity — above the pines. You may hear the same note, if you will listen, in the slow cadences of the Gregorian chant and of the wonderful hymns we sing. You may catch it again in the silence which makes our house so restful, in the simplicity of line of

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the Sisters' dress, in the self-abandonment of the vows. A very quiet, stern life; but a life which has all the perfect beauty of the eternal hills.

II

THE WORLD WITHOUT THE GATES

Looking down from my tower on clear mornings I can see the white ribbon of the highway that runs across the valley, coming out through the hills on one side and losing itself in the hills on the other. On bright Summer mornings, especially on Sunday mornings, the motors go across unceasingly. Up here, there is no sound of them, just moving shapes, like rapidly passing animals. Now and again we catch a flash of color, the turn of a parasol, the flutter of a veil. Where does the road go? To Memphis, perhaps, or to Babylon or Nineveh or Rome. Out into the great world, in any case. Perhaps it is the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho. One of those little specks of black that move beside it may be a "certain man," on his way to meet the thieves. If so, let us hope that the Good Samaritan will find him after the thieves have got through with him. But it is not

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every man who falls among thieves who is so fortunate.

What a pathetic procession that is that is ever streaming out from the quiet Jerusalem of home on to the road to Jericho — the procession of boys and girls going out to see the world, life. So full of hope, of eagerness to see and to know that mysterious thing, the world. Thieves await them at every turn of the road. They rob them of their innocence, their simplicity, their faith. They leave them rather more than half dead, for they persuade them that *life* is the very narrow road of sensual enjoyment, or the treadmill of pleasure seeking. Life is correspondence with environment, and when we narrow the environment we touch we narrow life proportionately. "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth," because she has drawn her life away from all wide and stimulating contacts, and reduced its interests to the narrowest possible circle of sensation. Her mind has become *carnal*; and to be "carnally minded is death." The road that leads from Jerusalem to Jericho runs *down* — down from the wind-swept heights, down from Mount Zion where the

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pinnacles of the Temple are flung up to heaven, down from sanctuary and sacrifice, down from the limitless uplands of the spirit, down to the narrow, crooked streets and crowded alleys where the sky is shut out and men mistake the lamps they have kindled for the stars of heaven. There, no doubt, there is feverish excitement, the stimulation of already over-wrought senses, the fascination of moving crowds. One gets the sense of progress, and does not stop to ask, where?

The world's attitude toward the Christian religion is one of tolerance so long as religion does not attempt to interfere with it — hence the numerous buildings with towers and crosses which supply the demand for a religion which does not interfere. In these everything is arranged with a view to comfort. No word is ever heard there which would be likely to offend the listener, or suggest that he needs any radical change of life. There is no hint there that the man whose whole life is covetousness, whose money-seeking will go all lengths that a clever lawyer will advise him to be safe; that the woman whose life is selfish gratification and whose expenditure is selfish waste, are not

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of the kingdom of heaven. The Scriptures are read there? Yes; but we have ceased to take them very seriously, we are not disturbed when we hear the Sermon on the Mount. The Seed, which is the Word of God, finds no place of growth in those who are "choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life." It is quite *safe* for such lives to belong to the Church because they can easily find a presentment of religion which is carefully padded to suit their needs.

It is always interesting to listen to the world's comment on religion. One of its stock criticisms is that religion neglects the plain duties of life. How many books and magazine articles have we read, sternly lecturing us on our duty to this world. A special term has been invented to designate our guilty neglect of the present opportunity. We are *other-worldly*. We feel the delight in the retort of those who have been called *worldly*. I myself wish there were some truth in the reproach; but I do not find that the average Christian, at least, is giving what even his most severe critic could judge to be an undue time to the affairs of the "other world," granting that those affairs are en-

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titled to any attention at all. From another point of view, it would be rather easy to reply to the charge by going through the United States, for example, and pointing out the activities of Christians in the care of the material and bodily interests of men. That, however, is hardly worth while; it would be to take the criticism too seriously.

What does interest me, is to note the fact that it is really the severest critics of Christianity whose interests are concentrated on the future. It is really the eager reformer, the most up-to-date disciple of progress, who lives in a world that never exists,—“Who never is, but always to be blest.” The man who really lives all his life in Utopia is the advocate of some sort of social revolution which he is quite sure will bring us to the land of promise—the land where no one will have to work, for every one will be supported by the State. Why reproach Christians with depicting a heaven of idleness—“of tabor-playing”? Certainly it is not Christians who are dreaming of a world in which the day’s work shall be six, or perhaps four hours; nor are they looking for a world which shall be an eternity of amusement, the

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heavenly analogue of a Sunday passed in motoring or golf. The heaven the Christian has in view is heaven where the worship of God is the central act, and where the spiritual strength derived from our union with God shall be expended in the service of God. It were certainly a very stupid and unintelligible notion of the world to come that it should be a world in which there is nothing to do! As though the universe of God were not of necessity rich in opportunities of service!

We were talking in the Common Room the other evening of the many current misconceptions of the Religious Life. Sister Anne told of a call she had made that afternoon on a woman who was terribly perplexed at the apparition of a Sister. Sister Anne had much difficulty in making her understand that she was not a Roman Catholic. "But I did not know that there were nuns in the Episcopal Church," she said. After further explanation, the woman said, "I see, you're High Church. My sister used to go to a High Church when we lived in Chicago; but I didn't much care for it. My sister was always getting up to go to early Church be-

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fore breakfast. I didn't see any sense in that."

"We got on pretty well together," Sister Anne concluded. "I think she will come to the Guild next Wednesday. But when I was coming away she said, 'You must live a dreadful narrow life.' What do you suppose she meant?"

"She probably meant," Novice Eunice threw in, "that we can't go to the Movies."

"It is odd how that notion of the narrowness of the Religious Life persists even among people who know something about a Sister's life," the Mistress commented.

"To me," Sister Ermentrude took it up, "the wonderful thing is the conception people have of breadth. I was brought up in a little town of about four thousand inhabitants. My father was cashier of a bank and got eighteen hundred dollars a year. There were three of us girls; we had to do all our own work, except that a woman came in to scrub once a week. We had to dress in the plainest possible way. We had to begin to earn our own living as soon as we were able. We never went anywhere nor saw anything. We were all members of the Congregational

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church and all the social life we had was connected with that. Though the city was not far off, and we read of operas and concerts and plays and lectures, there was never any money to spare for them. After I left home I was taken by a friend to a church where there was a sung Mass, and was introduced to one of the Sisters who worked in the parish. It didn't take me long to find my way here. But when I went home and told my family what I was going to do, my mother's comment was, 'Of course you must do what you think right; but I hate to see you take up such a narrow life.' Dear old thing," the Sister concluded.

"For my part," Sister Ursula said, "I have never lived so full a life as I am living now. In the world, I went every morning to an office and came back at night too tired to want to go anywhere but to bed. There was nothing at all in my life but the office routine and an occasional evening's amusement. We were all tired at home all the time, and didn't even talk very much. Father read the paper, and mother and I sewed, and then we went to bed early because we had to get up early. And what

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have I deserted that wide and useful life for? I make anywhere from twenty to fifty calls a week. I talk with all sorts of people on all sorts of things. I am looked upon as a sort of oracle who can give an opinion worth listening to on any subject, from How to feed the baby to How to manage 'him.' Then I have a Sunday School class of sixty infants — dears! They alone are a wider world than any I ever expected to touch before I came here."

"How wonderful it was to find a life of real breadth," a quiet voice came from the back-ground. It was Sister Mary Monica whom we knew vaguely had been very much in "the world" in her youth. As I watched her come forward into the circle, I recalled the brief sensation there had been when it was announced that she would enter a convent. She was giving up such wonderful opportunities, people said. Looking at her now, her thin, aging face showing clear in the light striking sharply upon it, I wondered how she would put her experience after all these years. "People who are brought up in what they like to call 'the great world,' " she began, "are so overwhelmed with a sense

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of the importance of that world that they are unable to understand that any other life can be placed in comparison with it. I think they are quite excusable, for they see that the greater part of the human race are trying to get where they are. When, on rare occasions, they hear their world denounced, it is by some one who is outside it. It is not very wonderful if they think that denunciation has its root in envy. The younger set finds its end in life in a constant round of dances, teas, house parties, and so on. They belong more or less to clubs and philanthropic societies which they support with a sense of doing their duty to the world. If any great demand is made for charity they get up an entertainment for the benefit of it. Their world is the world, in their experience, that everybody wants. Therefore when any one abandons it, it must be for a worse world, and the act needs explanation. They are a good sort, really; but it is they who live in a terribly narrow world and do not know it."

The Reverend Mother is not given very much to discussion. She mostly lets things take their course in the free time, looking on with a quiet air of approval, with now and

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then throwing in a remark to direct the conversation or to help light up a question. She now entered our conversation with the words, "I think that a good many women, especially mothers, who object to the Religious Life are not at all clear why they object. They know that they *do*; and the objections they make are what they have heard made by others. But these objections do not really get at the bottom of the matter. What is really in the back of their minds is the loss of the family life. The race is so convinced of the fundamental importance of the family that it looks on any who willingly abandons the family relation as a traitor. It must be every one's duty to keep the race going. One can sympathize with the point of view. There is nothing more beautiful in the world than the life of the family when it is what God wants it to be. I suppose most of us feel that: we sympathize with the wife-and-mother ideal. But what we understand, and what we have difficulty in making any one outside the gate understand, is the fact of our *vocation* — that we are not here because we have abandoned something that we found hard or took a dislike to, but be-

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cause we have been *called to something* — called by a voice we could not resist. Until the world sees the meaning of vocation it can hardly be expected to be enthusiastic about the Religious Life.”

The bell struck just then and the Sisters, courtesying to the Mother, went their several ways. I went back to my tower. Looking from the open window into the valley, now full of gray mist through rifts in which one catches here and there the light of a farm house, it is as though I had got above the sky and was looking down upon it. There is a distinct smell of Spring in the air. I catch, faintly, the voices of the peepers, singing of the coming of the renewed life of the world. *This* world, at least, does not oppose God, but is a most wonderful revelation of Him. One can pray with intense joy looking out into the soft dark of the Spring night. One feels the meaning of the Benedicite — “O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord: Praise Him and magnify Him forever.” One feels that they are doing it, these mountains and hills, these winds and stars, with an unswerving persistence that puts us to shame.

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I fell to thinking of the ambiguity of the word *world* we had been using so freely this evening. There are so many worlds! Each of us lives in a world of his own, a world of which he is the center. I see these human lives as *circles*, just touching, or cutting deeper or less deep into one another, as life influences life. I see larger worlds, circles of wider radii, which are groups of human beings drawn together by common interests. The business world, the worlds of literature, of art, of science,—these groups are almost endless. They tell of a certain concentration of thought and aim on a selected set of interests. They tell of a neglect, greater or less, of interests that lie outside the circumference of their circle. We are not very big — we humans — after all, and our sympathies are still narrow. There is still something of the primitive villager about us, to whom a stranger is an enemy. We are not over-hospitable to thoughts which stray into our circle from the outside. We show them scant courtesy and small consideration. If on the surface they look unintelligible, we are not inclined to spend much time in trying to fit them in

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with our stock of habitual thoughts. We do not really care very much for mental effort.

And religion — is that, too, a circle? I am afraid it is. It ought, of course, to be a circle embracing and unifying all the others. It ought to bring harmony and consistency into every man's thought. But in real life it is rarely so. It sometimes seems as though we were rather proud of the circumference of our circle, like to have it of barbed wire, electrified. Hence the warfare of religion and science, the hostility of religion and literature, and all the rest of the inane stupidity. Somehow we are slow in growing up, and there remains a good deal of the bad boy far on in life. One cannot but feel that a good deal of the obscenity and coarseness of present day literature and drama is a purely gratuitous attempt to shock the "puritan," and the "suburbanite," a gamin's demonstration that he is out of leading strings. In some circles, religious and other, there is a quite deliberate purpose *not* to understand one another which is disheartening. The circle of religion, at any rate, is wide enough to cover all the other circles if we

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would but come to an understanding. There is no legitimate business of life but can be spiritually expressed.

Ah! there, perhaps, is our trouble. The world, as we use the word to express something in opposition to religion, means to us *illegitimate business* — the business of life carried on without reference to, or in disregard of, the obligations of life. It would appear that the difference between the worldly and the unworldly person finally resolves itself into a difference of a *sense of obligation*. The essence of worldliness is the conviction of the supremacy of one's own desires. Hence worldliness can never be identified with the doing of this or that thing, or system of things. It is not a matter of clothes or amusement or riches. Men have been perfectly unworldly in king's palaces, and utterly worldly in episcopal palaces. The walls of a convent are not impervious to the spirit of the world. Worldliness is conformity to the world, seeking the material values of life as its ultimate values, and declining to recognize the demands of the kingdom of God upon us. After all, a circle can have but one center; the center of our

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life's circle can be but self or God. And according as the center is, so are we; we are "conformed to this world," or we are "transformed by the renewing of our minds," so that the supreme object of life for us is to "present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service."

So it became clear to me why there is all this opposition to the Religious Life — opposition even from people whom one thinks of as good Christians. What they really mean when they talk about the "narrowness" of the Religious Life, is that the Religious has recognized a greater obligation than self-determination from moment to moment. That she has accepted an external will as a guide to conduct. No doubt the objector would say, "I recognize the will of God, and that is enough." But unless the will of God come to us through an external authority it may easily turn out to be but our own will more or less disguised. The Church is rejected, the Religious Life is hated, because they insist that we are not laws unto ourselves.

Indeed, obedience, in convents and out,

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must always be a stumbling block and an objection as long as we conceive ourselves in separation from God, and our wills as something distinct from the will of God. Obedience becomes other than a yoke, becomes a joy, only through union with our blessed Lord. As we realize our lives in Him, as we grow close to Him, the will of the disciples becomes merged in the will of the Master. Our will is not lost, weakened, atrophied; not at all, it is intensified and invigorated. And this because, as I am in Christ, my will becomes the means of expressing my union with Christ. I no longer live a separate life, but Christ liveth in me, and is enabled to express Himself through me, because of the submission to Him of my will. So I find my life's true significance — it is a means of God's action on the world.

We cannot expect the world to understand this because it does not understand what we mean by union with Christ. To the world, so far as it sees religion at all, it sees it as conduct not as union. The difference is vital. Religion as conduct means doing an exterior will of God by means of repeated acts of our own will. Each act is a

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separate expenditure of energy, a distinct making up of the mind to act; possibly a distinct struggle with a contrary impulse not to act. But religion as union means that we have achieved such a relation to our blessed Lord, have so surrendered ourselves to Him, as to have found Him to be our supreme need and supreme joy. Thus we rejoice to will what He wills and have come to love the thing which is good. But whenever the sense of stress in corresponding to the will of our Lord, whether expressed to us through our knowledge of Him and His aims, or through the will of superiors, reappears, it is the reappearance of the Spirit of this world and we are being tempted to apostasy.

III

THOSE WHO SEEK

Down here in Sister Etheldred's garden there are daffodils and little pink and white tulips. Green heads are poking up out of the ground everywhere; green leaves are uncurling themselves on all trees and bushes, except on the oaks which show only little pinkish buds as yet. The oaks stand up very dignified and seem to say, "Why all this hurry?" For Nature is obviously in a hurry. You feel the rush of it all about you in the warm May air. After last night's warm shower you are conscious of a laugh and a leap in the foliage this morning. The garden reminds you of the rush of a flower ballet on to the stage — it is wonderfully dramatic, this coming of full Spring. The air of the valley throbs as the sun-rays pierce it. The floor of the valley has changed to the splendor of an Oriental rug — curiously mixed patches of browns and greens set in crude juxtaposition without any blending of the edges.

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Sister Etheldred wanders about the paths, obviously enchanted. There are so many wonderful things here, some in fulfillment, others in promise. There will be dark blue iris presently, and tall crimson tulips, and those green heads there tell of fragrant lilies when the Summer heat shall come. Then there are long beds where the roses are just showing little green leaflets, and a hedge of lilacs whose fat purple racemes promise to fill the garden with their fragrance. Sister Etheldred's one regret is that she could not have the formal garden of her childhood reproduced here; but, alas! the box could not be managed. Still we come as near it as we can; all the old flowers are here, and yet not quite the same. I wonder do we really care quite as much for these swollen modern editions of our old favorites, the foxgloves and the canterbury bells? Did we really want these fantastic hollyhocks and dahlias? I was asking Sister Etheldred this morning whether she really did prefer the flaming creations of modern horticultural art to the simple wild flowers; but she only smiled an odd little smile and answered, "We Religious, you know, are very conservative, and

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are reckoned to be far behind the times; but we have to plant in our gardens what the dealers sell us."

I have been lingering about the garden all the morning, carrying a book as a symbol of good intentions rather than because I expected to get any reading done. It is curious that on these days when all Nature seems to hurry as though it feared if it did not fill every moment disaster would overtake it, man is overcome with languor, feels all effort a bore and wants to sit idly in the sun. Well, no doubt, this is natural too; why then not yield to the exhortation of modern man for once, and "follow Nature." So I have been loafing in the garden all the morning watching Sister Etheldred direct the gardener in the spading and raking of the beds in which the seeds of the annuals are to be sown; watching the fat robins who can hardly wait for the gardener to turn up a spade-full of earth before they are upon it for the worms. The idle whim passes through my mind that I would like some day to catch a bushel or so of worms and feed them to a robin to find whether there is really any limit to his capacity.

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Later in the morning the Mistress came down to the garden bringing our latest aspirant. She — the Aspirant — is short and plump and has a merry face. A fine sense of humor, I gather, which will be a great consolation under the difficulties of the Religious Life if only she knows how to use it — if she doesn't it will be a source of trouble. The Aspirant will have to learn these things by experience, the sort of experience that teaches after it is too late to profit by. She comes to us from a great mercantile establishment where she has held a position of responsibility and authority — had servants under her, like the Centurion. I wonder if in her case as in his the lesson of authority is obedience. It is said that you cannot command well unless you know how to obey, but that is a counsel of perfection — the modifying *well* is perhaps what commonly drops out. But if she have not learned obedience through the commanding of others she will find convent days difficult.

We sat, the three of us, on a bench and talked. The Aspirant was eager, enthusiastic, confiding, a little excited. She was splendidly hopeful and, I felt, quite ready to

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take the final vows on the spot. "I just *had* to come," she said, in answer to a question. "I think what stirred me more than anything else was the fact that I had all those dozens of girls under me and, much as I saw they needed advice and help, I was able to do hardly anything for them. Our relations were commercial; and when I saw them drifting into temptation and tried to intervene they were apt to resent it — especially they resented any regulations about the place which they felt as restrictions on their liberty. I felt more and more that I ought to use my life to help others, and at last it came to me with great force that the Religious Life was the very thing that had been provided for such helpfulness. I felt a tug at my heart which has pulled me up to the top of this hill. I hope you will keep me," she added with a sudden tone of reserve as though she felt she had been talking too much.

They are very interesting, the seekers, who come knocking at the door of the Religious Life. They come driven by all sorts of motives except the one that is generally attributed to them in novels — disappoint-

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ment in love. In fiction, the broken hearted youth or maiden abandons the world and seeks the peace of convent cloister, but life is much less romantic. For the most part, those who seek the convent are started on the way by a desire to serve. This pitiful old world is getting more and more on people's nerves. The problem of living becomes more complex and pressing. Its appeal for help to-day is intensely personal. We have come to understand the sin of idleness. We are coming to understand the greater sin of selfishness — to understand that we are part of a society and that we live and die for that. And therefore all souls who are spiritually awake are gravely questioning how they shall fulfill their obligations to their brethren. One here and there discovers the Religious Life as the path they want. They want to serve, and they feel that service is a spiritual act. After a little experimentation with the various sorts of service which are open to them in the world, they determine that what they are offered does not fill their lives. They are repelled by the materialism and officialism of organized charity. How many of them have I known who had taken

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positions in charitable institutions and works only to find that the very motives which had taken them there were taboo. They were bidden to confine their ministrations to the bodies of men and women. They were forbidden to speak to them of spiritual things. They might see souls in hunger looking out of weary faces, but they were permitted to give only to the body. The materialism of schools and hospitals and homes in the end demonstrates its futility as a means of ministry to immortal beings.

Most of those who give themselves to such service are no doubt sucked into the routine and become serviceable cogs on the wheels of the machine of modern charity. Others give up in despair and drift back to the life they had sought to escape. Occasionally one finds the way to a convent door and asks to serve under the spiritual conditions which she feels must exist there. Such an one, I gathered, was our present Aspirant, though she had not passed through the mill of the public institution. She had not been disillusioned by a course of ministry to the body. Therefore her vision had not been dimmed and she was all for service.

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These things passed through my mind as I listened to her. I could see that something the same train of thought was passing the mind of the Mistress as she gravely listened to the Aspirant's self-unfolding. The Mistress was making up her mind, I felt sure, as to whether this were a propitious time to begin the readjusting of the mind of the Aspirant — whether now would not be as good a time as any, when the subject was already on the table, of suggesting the difference in point of view between the secular and the Religious in this matter of good works. As I felt the mood of the Aspirant to be receptive, I concluded so to start the subject that the Mistress would have to follow it.

“What you tell us is most interesting,” I said, “and I quite understand your feeling that if you were going to be helpful to others you had got to give them something more than material ideals of life. Unless life to them is more than meat and drink you cannot expect them to be interested in anything higher than meat and drink. I understand, too, your feelings that if you are going to teach people to seek the things that

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matter—the eternal things—you needed training, spiritual education. So you come to St. Mary's as the place to get it. I wonder if you quite got to the bottom of the matter. It really would be strange if you had, having seen so little of the Religious Life. I fancy the Mistress can supplement your understanding of what you will find here, if she be willing to."

The Mistress was evidently glad of the way opened. "There is always the chance of confusion of thought," she began, "as to the fundamental purpose of the Religious Life. Those who come as you and so many others do," she continued, turning with a smile to the Aspirant, "out of the thick of an active life, oppressed by the evil and suffering that there is in the world, and eager to give yourself to its relief, have uppermost in your mind a conception of the Religious Life as a *means of training for work*. You think of the years of the Novitiate as a time of preparation for an active life of service. Now let me say very plainly, at the expense of whatever shock to your vision of that which lies before you, that if it turns out that all you want is to be a skilled Church-

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worker you will find no place here. Please do not misunderstand me. I am not at all underestimating the value or the virtue of the trained Church-worker; I am merely trying to make it clear that the Church-worker is one thing and the Religious quite another thing."

"But," the Aspirant, evidently quite thrown adrift, interrupted; "but I thought that was what a Sister did — Church work. I have been to guilds and classes for the past year, and I have known of the number of people whom you see and the number of calls you make. I do not at all understand when you say you are not trained for Church work."

"You did not quite follow me," the Mistress replied, "and I did not expect you would catch the point of view all at once. Perhaps I can illustrate what I mean. You have, you told us, been working for some years in a large mercantile firm. That firm is conducted, you explained, on the lines of advanced humanitarianism in business. It provides all sorts of comforts for its employees. It insures them; it provides them with proper food at a mid-day

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meal; it encourages among them organizations for self-improvement and amusement. These things are no doubt of great value and helpfulness. They show an appreciation on the part of the company that they are employing in their work, not living machines, but human beings. But valuable and praiseworthy as this humanitarian program is, no one would for a moment imagine that it was the reason for the existence of the company. The company exists to manufacture and sell certain goods and to pay certain dividends to its stock holders. To put it in another way, the humanitarian work of the company is a by-product — and none the less valuable on that account.

“ Now, I imagine, you can see the analogy between this and the Religious Life. Religious Orders do an immense amount of what is commonly summed up in the word *good*. They conduct orphanages and refuges and schools; they visit, they instruct; they prepare young people for the Sacraments and old people for death. But no item of all this is of the essence of the Religious Life; they are its by-products. The religious life itself can be led by a hermit in

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a cave in the desert, or by a group of men or women in a house in a secluded valley where no one ever comes. The Religious Life can be lived there because it is not a *work*, but a *life*; because it is not an offering made to men but to God."

I felt, when the Mistress and the Aspirant had gone, that the latter would be rather slow in the reconstruction of her conceptions of the Religious Life; but there is the root of the matter in her, I feel sure. She will go on.

One who is quite unversed in the Religious Life must find great difficulty in grasping its significance. Sitting here on a bench in the May sunlight, watching Sister Etheldred direct the work of her gardener, feeling her intense interest in the work and her entire mastery of the details of it, it is difficult not to feel that gardening is the prime interest of the Sister's life. But she knows that it is quite possible that the Mother shall send for her this afternoon, and say, "Your ticket is taken for New York where you will report for work to the Sister Superior of the school." Three days from now she may be looking out from a lit-

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tle window in a stuffy third story room into a brick court where Sister Juliet's black cat is licking itself in the Summer sun. If this were to happen Sister Etheldred would go cheerfully, with perhaps one regretful glance from the door-step at her garden as she got into the motor which was to take her to the station. Shortly after, if one were in the garden, one would see Sister Ursula appear and look over the ground as its new tenant — not a tenant at will, but a tenant at someone else's will.

The Aspirant will have to learn first of all, if she is to find a place here, that she is not called to a work, but to a life, as the Mistress explained to her: that she is not offering herself to serve men but to serve God. Incidentally, no doubt, she will serve men, and with a wonderfully useful service; but it will be because God has accepted the offering of her life and turned its energies to the service of His children. The face of the Religious is always Godward, however her hands may be employed.

And it turns out in experience that this is the way to form effective workers. There are so many ineffective workers in the world

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because men and women think that good intentions make a good worker, with the addition, perhaps, of some instruction in the methods and details of modern charity. But really to be fit to work for others implies that one is a certain sort of person rather than that one has a certain skill derived from training. The training of the Religious Life is directed to the production of a certain sort of character. Ordinary vocations in the world do not depend very much on character — spirituality has little to do with being a book-keeper or a typist. It doesn't make much difference whether a lawyer or a bank president says his prayers. None of these are working for spiritual results. When we are looking for spiritual results we can only hopefully look for them from spiritual persons.

The Angelus rang, and I stood up and said the Ave, and then turned toward my tower. The severe gray front of the convent impressed me with fresh force. It seemed the ideal setting of the life within. Yes, I thought, that is the final account of the Religious Life, that it is a form of sacrifice. These Sisters going silently through the

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cloister to sing Sext are those who have found in sacrifice the highest expression of love. They come with all sorts of notions as to what is involved in the call to the Religious Life; but they have learned one by one that the chief thing that is involved in it is the giving of one's self to the love of our Lord. Our Lord calls whom He will to serve Him, and because one hears the call and responds it does not at all follow that she understands what is involved in the call. It is sufficient that she know that it is the call of the Master. None of the Apostles knew what was involved in the "Follow me" of our Lord; but when they left all and followed Him the meaning of the vocation was step by step made known to them. Perhaps they would have been terrified out of all power of response if they could have seen all that their vocation meant — if St. James could have seen the headsman's sword or St. Peter his cross. What they actually saw was our Lord. They were called to be with Him, and all that being with Him meant they were prepared to meet when the time came.

Those who come in at these gates to offer themselves to the Religious Life come, not

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only with a vocation, but they come with a queer assortment of opinions as to what the vocation means for them. One thinks she is going to do a wonderful work. Another thinks she will spend most of her time in the Chapel, in meditation and intercession. "She has a gift of intercession." There is apt to be trouble and disillusionment when it turns out that one of the primary works of the embryo Religious is to sweep and dust. "I did not have to come to a convent to do that — I could do that at home," is often the revelation of a mistake which the soonest rectified the better. After all, the sun shines in the valley as well as on the hills, and down there also there is wonderful work to be done for our Lord. So at St. Mary of the Hills the motor is always near the door.

And this is as it should be. The visit of the Aspirant is for the purpose of clearing her mind, of the settlement of questions which have had no answers because she has not hitherto been able to ask them intelligently. The conferences with the Mother and the Mistress, the attendance at the Chapel services, the observation of the rou-

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tine of the life, will enable her to adjust and systematize her mixed thoughts about her vocation. Her prayers in the Chapel will bring the final guidance, and if her vocation emerges as an indisputable thing, she will be accepted and thereupon put on the garb of the Postulant, than which there is no greater indication that pride of personal appearance is dead.

IV

THE NOVICES

I can imagine no more delightful place than the Cloister of St. Mary of the Hills on an evening in early June. The sun has been very hot to-day, and now that it has gone behind the hills the evening cool begins to creep upon us, bringing the sharp fragrance of the pines. Little puffs of breeze, coming up from the garden, bring the delicate perfume of the roses, now in full bloom. I saw them this morning, row on row of them, holding up to the sun great staring faces — crimson and white and gold. One imagines that Sister Etheldred must have exhausted the possibilities of the rose world to get such a profusion of form and size and color. There are roses that climb on trellises and roses that nestle close to the ground; roses with dainty buds and flowers, reminding one of tiny girls arrayed for a party; roses that hold themselves up stiff

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and erect like soldiers on parade. Now in the gathering twilight the Cloister is full of the odor of them.

The sunset was very quiet this evening; not one of the flaming displays of dramatic coloring we are often treated to. There were no clouds and the sun went down quietly, leaving us a pale golden green after-glow in the midst of which there is now set one great star. On these Summer evenings the Mother elects that the free time shall be spent here in the Cloister so that looking out into the evening light we are saturated with the beauty of heaven and earth. We are very conscious of the divine beauty, I think, for we are apt to sit silent looking out into the glory of the West. When the light goes out and the last robin has finished his song, all the insects of our trees and lawns begin their nightly concert. All through the hours of dark one can hear them ceaselessly chanting, till the light comes and the birds awake to relieve them. So Nature keeps an endless watch of perpetual adoration. We in the Convent do not wish to be behind them in this.

I think our impulse would be to dream

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away this early evening time in the Cloister, watching the changing tones of the sky and listening to the hymn of Nature. But the Mother thinks it is easy to have too much dreaming. We keep silence a good part of the day, she says, and the silence is a spiritual act, an offering to God. So also ought our conversation to be. When the time comes to talk we ought to talk to the glory of God. The conversation of the Convent, she contends, is just as important in its own way as the silence. Our conversation is a religious act and therefore ought not to be just desultory and aimless talk. When we are together we ought, part of the time at least, to talk about something of common interest. There are many sides to the Religious Life that can only be completely understood when we bring our reading and our instruction and our experience together into a common fund, as it were. We have all things in common in the way of temporal goods; why not literally all things?

So it is that the Mother, having given us a little time to stretch our minds, so to put it, in unconnected talk, will bring up some

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subject of common interest and start us upon that. We like it; and we never tire of going over the fundamental questions of the Religious Life. Truly they are so deep that we never succeed in getting to the bottom of them. And then there are always the younger Sisters and the Novices who need help in thinking out these matters. I think the Mother in choosing our evening subject usually has in mind some individual need which the day has revealed to her.

This evening this was openly so. "Sister Ursula," she said, "is in correspondence with a young woman whom she met last Summer and who feels drawn to our life. It is the common case of how one is to know if one truly has vocation. We have all had to settle that for ourselves. But what we settled was that we *had* vocation; none of us had to settle that we *had not*. When the voice of our Lord becomes very clear then we easily follow on. But in the case of some of us it was true,—was it not?—that there was a period of doubt, of hesitation, of fear, perhaps, before we got to the light. When we meet with a soul in such circumstances, how are we to deal

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with it? But perhaps Sister Ursula will state her case."

Sister Ursula has not long been professed, and has an air of timid reserve as though she were not quite sure of herself. But one could easily infer too much from that shy appearance. She is really a Sister of great insight and spiritual acumen. She now told her story. The subject of it, it appeared, was a young woman of twenty-five years, without parents, living with an aunt, but with independent means. No, the aunt did not need her, the Sister explained; there was no doubt at all about her external vocation. It was the internal vocation that was in question. The girl had led the usual life of the average Church member, making her communions with some regularity, and leading a pretty careful external life. Lately, for a year or more, she had been becoming dissatisfied with her spiritual state. Last October she had been to a retreat and made her first confession. She had got her first real view of a Convent then. Of late her dissatisfaction had increased and she felt drawn to the Religious Life. What sort of drawing was this? Was it our Lord calling her,

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or was it a part of her restlessness prompting her to seek for peace in any possible way? Could one really tell?

The Mother likes the Novices to take a large part in such a conversation as this when they can contribute something out of their own recent experiences; so she looked over to Novice Eunice with a smile of encouragement. "I found," the Novice said, "that the beginning of vocation was very distressing and perplexing, and I think many others must have gone through the same experience. The thought of the Religious Life comes, and as soon as one faces it one realizes how revolutionary it is. If one follows, one has to abandon all that one has been accustomed to; and although one may not have felt any great value in the life one was leading or in the things one possessed — one might even have been quite dissatisfied with them — yet when it is a question of giving them up for an unknown life one naturally *clings*. One does not cling because of the value of the things one has, but because one cannot conceive what life will be like without them. One might not think much of a boat in which one was

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crossing a river, but if it began to sink under one, one would look at it in a new light. I am quite sure that the shrinking of those called to the Religious Life is not so often a clinging to the world as a fear of the unknown. The command to launch out into the deep is truly terrifying."

"There is a whole lot in that," Novice Emeline said. "I still shudder a little when I remember my own plunge. But I take it that what we want to know is how to help women to take it."

"Why not," Novice Anna broke in, "just tell them to shut their eyes and jump? That is what I did."

"I fancy," the Mother interposed with a smile, "that that would hardly be a safe rule to lay down. We haven't all Novice Anna's temperament, and temperament counts a good deal in such matters. We have to take that into account in giving advice. To the type of woman who eternally weighs and hesitates, who stands before the Religious Life waiting for somebody to help her in, as she stands on the curb and waits for the policeman to help her over the street, one may very well say, 'Jump'; feeling, per-

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haps, doubtful whether she will get anywhere in the Religious Life, but will probably have to be helped out again. But to the average Aspirant I should say 'Look before you leap.'"

"But how can you look," Novice Anna insisted, "at what you cannot see? Now you cannot *see* the Religious Life from the outside. One has to make the venture that will bring one inside before one can see at all."

"Perhaps, after all, the trouble is," Sister Mary Martha said, "that the Aspirant is looking for the wrong thing." Sister Mary Martha is very old and rarely speaks. She moves quietly about the halls of the Convent, and spends most of her time in the Chapel. She is too feeble to kneel long, but one can find her most times sitting before the Tabernacle, and one is very sure that our Lord is saying wonderful things to her. So when she speaks we all listen. "One who is struggling with the first thoughts of vocation," she went on, "begins to inquire into the details of the Religious Life. What will she have to do? What will she have to

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wear? Can she see her friends? How often can she write home? Then she begins to wonder whether she can really give up this thing or that. But all the time this is mere waste of energy, unnecessary perplexing of one's self. If I had to advise any one to whom the thought of vocation had come, it would be to adjourn all inquiries as to details of the Religious Life to some future time, and to spend all the time possible in attempting to find out our Lord's will. And she would find that by offering herself to our Lord. The problem is very simple. Our Lord seems to call us to something. Well, the only thing we can do is to offer ourselves to Him. That is the response that vocation has always meant, is it not? 'Speak Lord, for Thy servant heareth.' 'Here am I, send me.' 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord.' After we have offered, He will show the next step. But we shall have difficulty if we insist on knowing all the details before we offer. I should advise your friend," she concluded, "to jump, as Novice Anna says; but I should advise her not to jump off into the unknown

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not knowing whether she would sink or swim, but to jump into the arms of our Lord. She won't have to jump far."

"I found," it was a young Sister who had been listening intently, Sister Josepha, who spoke, "I found that the real test of my vocation was in obedience. Isn't it true," she went on, "that the test of one's vocation is a very personal thing, like the vocation itself? The general rules that are laid down have to be so broad that there is often difficulty in applying them to the individual case. I myself had felt that I was called to the Religious Life for some years before the way was clear to offer myself. I had been all the time praying about it and trying to give my life to our Lord. But even when the day came to take the train for the convent, I found that I was not at all sure of my vocation. As I say, for me the real test came when I found that I had to obey. I had not thought of that very much. I, of course, knew about obedience in a general way, but when I found what Religious obedience actually meant, and my will began to resist, and I was tempted to make reservations, then it became clear to me that if I

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were truly called by our Lord to this Life I should be able to obey, and at the same time the ability to obey would be for me a confirmation of my vocation."

There was silence for a little, I think we felt disinclined to break the quiet of the fading twilight. I went on following out the thought of vocation. How strange a thing it is, this voice of the divine Bridegroom in the soul, and how strange that when it comes one may be so uncertain about it. I suppose there are so many voices contesting for the mastery that we are never quite certain whether our Lord's voice is really one of them. That is inconceivable? No, not at all. The more one studies the divine method of spiritual direction, the more certain one is that there would be left in the calls of God just this element of uncertainty. I often find myself wondering, awe struck, at the divine respect for human freedom. God never, by any chance, forces Himself on man. That is the lesson of the divine disapproval of Moses in the matter of the smiting of the rock, is it not? That is the meaning of the criticism of Elijah after he had smitten the priests of Baal. In

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his refuge in the wilderness, the still small voice makes him feel the futility of the method of force. Our Lord, at the beginning of His ministry, rejected the temptation to win His cause by force when the devil offered to give Him all that He asked; and later in His ministry He had occasion more than once to criticize the action of His disciples: "Ye know not what spirit ye are of," He said to the sons of Zebedee. "Put up thy sword into its sheath," He commanded St. Peter. There is a tremendous lot of irresponsible talk about freedom of speech and action, and the way in which religion interferes with them. True religion does not. It never resorts to force. It respects human freedom as God respects it — rather losing the cause than forcing the man. There is a wonderful moment when our Lord faces the possibility of failure through man's assertion of his freedom. It was when "many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him, that Jesus said unto the Twelve, Will ye also go away?" We feel the critical moment. We feel the whole cause in the balance. We see our Lord looking into the faces of the Twelve.

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And we know that our Lord will not make any movement, will not say one word, to influence the Twelve. We know that those men are utterly free. They, looking into the eyes of our Lord, must decide.

It is that way in vocation, I thought. Our Lord offers Himself; He calls. But we, seeing and hearing, must decide. *He will not decide for us.* Much less then can any human being decide for us. It is often a long and weary work because we have, among all the multitude of voices which sound in our lives, to distinguish this one unobtrusive voice. But this world which clamors so about freedom of self-determination has no hesitation at all in trying to force itself upon the Neophyte. It clamors at the gate of the soul like a merchant eager to sell his wares. "What do ye lack, what do ye lack?" it cries at the door of every sense. To every craving appetite it offers satisfaction. But our Lord does "not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street." He only stands silently at the door and knocks; He will not even open the door Himself. But if any man hear His voice and open the door, He will come

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in to him and will sup with him. That is the experience of the called soul. "I sleep, but my heart waketh; it is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my Sister, my Spouse." But the *opening* is ours.

I had got so far as this in my meditation when the silence was broken by a timid voice, which I discovered to belong to Novice Angela, the last of our Novices to be clothed. She was saying, "Of course one finds a great revelation of one's self when one faces the virtue of obedience. In my case, at least, it was a revelation which shook the conviction that I had of my vocation to the very depths. But I understood after a little that I should be able to obey, and to obey cheerfully and not mechanically, if my vocation was true. Our Lord who has called me will not leave me a prey to my self-will. If I give my will to Him, He Himself will thereafter be my will. But there is one thing I would like a little more light upon, if it be not straying too far from the subject, and that is about the limits of obedience. I don't mean," she hastened on, "whom we are to obey. I know, of course, that we are

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to obey all lawful superiors. What I have in mind is the possible conflict between the plain will of the Superior and what seems, at least, the plain dictate of conscience. Now I have always been taught that conscience is our supreme law; yet I see that if one is entitled to oppose conscience to authority on all occasions there would soon be an end to authority. I fancy I am just stupid and that there is an easy answer to the question," the Novice concluded.

"Perhaps the Chaplain will answer that," suggested the Mother.

Thus called upon, I moved a little more into the circle. "The conscience," I said, "is a very peculiar endowment. I fancy the Novice has been taught, as so many of us have been taught, to look upon the conscience as an organ of information, as an inner voice telling us what is right and what is wrong. Most of our trouble arises out of that erroneous view. The conscience is not an organ of information but an organ of judgment; or rather, it is just the enlightened judgment itself. It doesn't at all tell us what is right and what is wrong; what is right and what wrong are convictions we

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derive from our education. What conscience does is to urge us to do what we are convinced is right and to avoid what we are convinced is wrong. It judges that a given act falls into that classification of right and wrong which has been given us by our education, and urges us to act accordingly.

“Now it is plain that while in the end we have to follow conscience, there is room on the way to this end for a good many blunders. For instance, if we have fallen into the blunder of supposing conscience to be an organ of information, it is very easy to confuse our conscience with our will. We are directed by a Superior to do something and we strongly revolt against it and say our conscience will not permit us to do it, when it is not our conscience at all that is speaking, but our will. Willfulness is very far indeed from being conscientiousness; and it is much more common. The test we must try to apply is, whether we are quite certain that a given act is against the law of God, or whether the only certainty we have is that it is against our own will.

“For the only thing we can have conscientious scruples about is what is plainly against

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the law of God. It is not at all likely that the command of a Superior will be of that nature. If it should seem so, it would be well to investigate our own conception of right and wrong. There is nothing more common than an erroneous or misinformed conscience owing to our present lack of religious education. Therefore we had much better suspect ourselves than our Superiors. For we may be absolutely certain of the obligation in conscience to obey Superiors in all things lawful — not in all things that seem to us to be desirable or expedient for the good of the Order, but in all things lawful. To resist a direction of a Superior we must be perfectly certain that it requires us to violate some law of God, that is, to sin. You see, therefore, how very academic such a discussion as this really is. We have only to get the case clearly stated to see this. What actually perplexes Novices and young Sisters at times is that they are required to do things which do not commend themselves to their judgment. Now, the moral principle is that it is always safe to obey a Superior, and always required that we should so obey, where there is no perfectly plain

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conflict between the command and the law of God. If there be an error of judgment, the responsibility is the Superior's and not the subject's. We are right to obey even though our judgment as to the expediency of the command is justified."

As the Sisters went into the hall leaving me sitting alone in the Cloister, I could not but think of the many perplexities of mind and soul which might be banished if the Church did its duty and provided some sort of elementary religious education, especially education in morals. Even the little time that is given to the education of children is mostly spent on quite unessential matters — the ordering of Sunday School courses is a lamentable thing — while the elements of religion and morals go untaught. But, I thought, it is needless to excite myself over the unattainable. Much better read a little of St. Francis and go to bed.

V

THE CHAPEL

Perhaps you would be disappointed in our Chapel. One can be almost certain that you would come to it with an expectation of finding it filled with Gothic twilight. You would be expecting the twinkle of dim altar lights, and to find dark corners where you could pray unnoticed. To the mind of to-day the Religious Life and Gothic seem to belong together. So, I say, you will very likely be disappointed, if not displeased, when you come into our Chapel and find that it is filled with light. The Chapel is long and rather narrow, and the Sisters' stalls are, of course, choirwise, with return-stalls for the Mother and other dignitaries within the low screen which runs across the Chapel, well down toward the door. The roof is flat and handsomely decorated with medallions of the Saints. The Altar is very high above the floor of the Sanctuary and is very simple, and with but two lights, save when

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we want to emphasize some festival. We have no stained-glass windows, for we are not rich; but we do not miss them. We are fond of leaded glass which lets in floods of amber light. In compensation for the absence of colored windows with their stories of saintly lives, we have many statues — statues everywhere, for we have a great devotion to the Saints. I myself like the statue of the Saint better than the picture. I have never been drawn to prayer by a stained-glass window; but one can always kneel down before a statue and get a vivid impression of a personality with whom one is seeking communion. But this may be merely an individual feeling.

It was the Mother Foundress who planned the Chapel and won her own way after stiff tilts with the architect. The Chapel, the Mother Foundress contended, is the true work-room of the Order. There most that is of importance in its life takes place. And therefore it is of primary importance that the Chapel of our Order should embody and emphasize, not the Gothic tradition, but the spirit and ideals of the Order. Now our conception of the Religious Life is that it is

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a cheerful thing. We ought, so the Mother Foundress was never tired of saying, we ought to make it clear that we are not a set of disgruntled and disillusioned people who have "fled from the world," but that we are a set of joyful people who live our lives in the conscious presence of God. Therefore, what is properly our work-room should be full of light and color, the symbol of our gladness. We do not want to strain our eyes over books in dark corners; we want to sing our Offices cheerfully in the broad light of Brother Sun. Even our evening Offices are full of light — the concealed electric lighting giving us almost the sense of daylight.

I have always been thankful to the Mother Foundress for this conception of the Religious Life that she impressed upon our Order from the beginning. The Religious offers her life to our Lord in response to His call with a feeling of intense thankfulness that she has been chosen by Him. The inner note of her vocation is joy. When you see one of our Sisters going gravely about her work, you are apt to think that what her composed manner indicates is success

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on the repression of tears. If there be any self-repression indicated it is most likely an inclination to sing that is restrained. I think I heard Sister Etheldred singing to the roses the other morning as she was picking a huge bunch of them for the Altar; and I am quite sure that I caught the Sister Sacristan one day smiling up at St. Stephen, as she dusted his statue. She was no doubt telling him how wonderful she thought it to have been *first* martyr. It must quite have made up for being stoned to have been the first to follow our Lord in the Way of the Cross. I couldn't see whether St. Stephen smiled back — the dust-brush hid his face.

No: this is no place of tears and long faces and doleful lives after the imagination of the children of this world. We have come into the Religious Life because of a great love, thus in our distant way imitating our Lord's coming to us. And what we have found in the giving of ourselves is best symbolized by light. It is not at all true that the life of self-discipline we lead is a saddened and depressed life. It would be, no doubt, if discipline had no end beyond

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itself. But the rigorous discipline that the life of the vows imposes is not intended, and does not, in fact, repress and depress; it effects the release of spiritual powers which are commonly held in check, if not wholly atrophied, in undisciplined lives. To be pure and chaste and obedient is not to have lost all that makes life worth living: it is to have got rid of hindrances to free spiritual expansion. It is surely an extraordinary notion of the life of the Christian to suppose that the cultivation of the fruits of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, and the rest — should result in mourning and lamentation and woe. No: it is not at all the fact that we spend most of our time on the terrace watching, our eyes filled with tears of regret, the passing motors on the road in the valley.

Hence the Mother Foundress' love of light and beauty — not dim half-lights and hesitating tones, but broad splendid light and gorgeous coloring. Hence it was that she chose a hill-top on to which the sun pours his light all day long, and the moon and the stars cover it with their glory in the night hours. She would have no secluded

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valley, but the wind-swept hill-top — yes, the hill-top where the north wind twists and tortures the pines and heaps the Winter snow in drifts about our door; and where the sheets of Spring rain pelt against our windows all the night. Hence, too, the care lavished upon our garden, till it blazes with rapturous color all the Summer long. We emulate the strange gayety of the Saints, and take as our motto the old saying of the convents, “A Saint that is sad is a sad Saint.”

The Chapel is indeed our work-room. It is there that there goes on the prime work of the Religious, the *Opus Dei*, the work of God. The rest of our day, indeed, is arranged with reference to the recitation of the Divine Office, the Canonical Hours of the Religious House. Here we assemble at stated intervals through the day to offer to God the sacrifice of our lips. All other work stops for this work. When the bell strikes the Sisters come from all their various occupations to this their supreme occupation.

I find that to the visitor from without the gates, this constant recitation of the Divine Office is almost the most perplexing thing

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about our lives. Those who come to a convent for a visit and are curious to see what the Religious Life is like, seem usually to experience a sense of relief when they find the Sisters actually doing something which they call work. They understand work; and all work to them is *useful*, so they are relieved that they can go back and tell their friends that they found the Sisters usefully occupied. But when the bell strikes and they see the Sister stop in the midst of some direction to the gardener, or lay down her brush, or fold up her sewing and rise from the unfinished task to go to the Chapel, their ideas of the relative importance of things are upset. As they phrase it, "The Sisters are always running to Chapel."

I never try to explain very much about it. If you stay in a Religious House long enough you get to understand it and to love it. I, of course, not being a Religious, do not go to all the Offices. But I like to sit in my tower where the chants and hymns float up to me, fascinating me with their strange rhythms. How different they are from the romantic and utterly secular music to which we are accustomed in our churches. As the

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notes of some familiar hymn come to me I am sent dreaming back through the centuries to those first Religious Houses, to those groups of holy men and women in the deserts, where the recitation of the Psalter was the substance of the routine of their worship. Through all the centuries since, in all places where the Catholic religion has found its way, this worship has gone up to God. In cells in the desert, in superb convents, in huts in heathen villages, in boats passing over the sea, under the grateful shelter of forest trees, the music of the Divine Office has sounded. As I sit here dreaming, the voices of all these past centuries of the Religious Life seem to come to me mingled with the voices of the Sisters in the Chapel below.

We may take this daily recitation of the Office as the presentation of a perpetual oblation. The action of the Mass, which is the great sacrificial act of the day, is taken up and continued in the Offices of the day. They present the unceasing worship which is the inner meaning of the Religious Life. To the Religious the day is a unit of worship. From the prayer with which she con-

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secretes the day as she awakes to consciousness in the morning, to the prayer with which she commends herself and the day now passed to the mercy of God as she composes herself to sleep, it is one act of ceaseless self-oblation which she has been carrying on. The Mass and the recitation of the Hours are emphatic points in it; but they are not isolated points; they are held together by an inner thread of worship which is the private meditation and prayer of the Sister. The union of her life in Christ is unbroken, but only at times does it become visible and audible in the acts of worship which she shares with her Sisters. It is the Chapel which is the scene of these, the place where their oneness in Christ and with one another is evidenced by acts which are acts of the Community. For it is a common life that we are living, and our worship of God is the offering of the Community in which our lives have been merged in order that through common action they might find a deeper significance.

This sense of the common life finds its complete realization in the Holy Communion. One sometimes feels that in the life of

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most Christians in the world the Communion is a *luxury*; it is of relatively infrequent occurrence and is something which supplements the ordinary supports of life. Here in the Convent, however, the daily Eucharist is indeed *Daily Bread* — the spiritual food and sustenance that we need with the same regularity as we need material food. We are trying to live in the spirit, and the work of spiritual living is vastly exhausting. "Give us this day our daily bread" becomes the insistent cry of our souls. "The Bread of angels" is ever the need of those who are living the angelic life.

For my part, I feel that I have here learned much of the meaning of the life of the first Christians whose story we get in all too imperfect fragments in the Book of the Acts. For a brief space the life of the young Christian community is revealed to us as a *common life*. "All that believed were together, and had all things in common." And what was the bond of this common life was the daily Eucharist: "They continued daily in the temple, and breaking bread in the house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." One never reads

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it without a sigh of regret. It was, I suppose, impossible of long continuance in an unconverted world. These first Christians soon realized that they needs must gird themselves and go forth to the battle of missionary labor. And yet one sometimes questions whether the world's conversion would not have progressed better had it simply been subjected to the attractive power of the ideal life of the Christian community. There had to be preaching, to be sure; but is not the uttermost power of Christian propaganda in the exemplification of what the preaching means in the life of Christians, rather than in the theory itself? The converting power of pure theory is very small. The converting power of a sanctified life is tremendous — we can set no limit to it. We understand, therefore, how it has happened that again and again in the history of the Church it is the Religious Life that has come to the rescue and saved a Church which seemed on the way to perish. It has been the Religious House, set on the confines of Christendom, or built in the midst of a degenerate community, which has been the center of light and power from which went

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forth the energy of renewal. It was the spectacle of a life lived in common, a life based on purely spiritual motive and held together in the charity of the Gospel, which was the evidence to despairing men of the continuous vitality of the Christian faith.

In the dire distress and spiritual destitution of this present Western world, wherein we multiply Christians (according to the statistical tables of the Census) but surely do not increase Christian living, where the barbarism of materialism is clamoring at our doors that life is *not* more than meat nor the body than raiment, where are we to look for help if not to the same exhaustless stream of spiritual vitality from which a fainting Church has drunk again and again? I, for one, am profoundly convinced that our one hope for the future lies in a wide revival of the Religious Life. To-day the Church draws to it a few sympathetic souls who are barely sufficient in number to fill the places emptied by death. The Church is not now a great missionary or converting power. Meanwhile the power of evil flourishes. It is a demonstration that our parochial system is utterly incompetent to deal with the situa-

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tion. The one known Christian institution which can deal with it is the Religious Life. We need Religious Houses indefinitely multiplied, which means that we need a vast increase in vocation.

And, as I was saying, what gives the Religious House its power is its spiritual unity. Other experiments in common living have been tried with some degree of success. The Settlement House, as I understand it, is the Religious House without the religion; that is, it is an attempt at brotherhood which seeks its basis of union in our common humanity. While the Settlement has given a field of activity for many noble and self-sacrificing lives, it has certainly been a disappointment as an instrument for the regeneration of society. The Religious House does not seek to draw its supplies of energy from man but from God. It presents the spectacle of a brotherhood or sisterhood which is one because of its participation in a common life, the imparted life of the Incarnate God. Such invite men, not to be better behaved in the interests of their own happiness and the good of the community, but to participate in a new life which will

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produce in them the gladness and singleness of heart of the first Christian community.

The spiritual unity of the Religious House is in reality the outgrowth of its Eucharistic life. At the foundation of the spiritual practice of the House is the daily Eucharist. And here it can be, what it cannot be elsewhere under our present conditions of life, a daily communion, a daily partaking in common of the Risen Life of our Lord. Not, of course, that every Sister receives every day, but that many receive every day, and that all receive often enough to make the Communion the center of a common life. This is the bond that binds us in one. We realize that we are one, not through a common vocation or a common work or a common aim, but through our participation in a common life. We are first of all one with Christ and, by natural consequence, one with each other. This is our strength. And because this is our strength, we keenly feel that our worst temptations are to such sins as will injure the peace and unity of the House. That which above all we have to struggle against are sins against charity — envy, criticism, jealousy, and the like. Qualities in

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a Novice which would disturb the peace and unity of a House cast grave doubt upon her vocation.

We are members one of another ; there lies our power. We present to the world the spectacle of a simple life, lived in common, and one which, because of the slightness of its needs, does not have to be constantly absorbed in the material struggle of life. We have time and energy for the growth of the spirit. We call the world back to the simplicity of the Sermon on the Mount.

Simplicity is the outstanding feature of our common life. It is seen everywhere, and nowhere more than in the services of our Chapel. The Mass is very careful, the Altar and all its appointments are faultless. We do not, like the people Tertullian tells about, confound disorder with simplicity. We do not think simplicity is attained by the absence of ceremonial. The simplicity that we aim at is the simplicity which is attained, and only attained, when every detail of a service is known before hand, and every participant in a service perfectly knows his part. Then the mind is free for the central interest of the service, and there is

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no need for the fuss and confusion which attend the services of those who have thought it simple and spiritual not to know what they were going to do. But our Mass — a Mass with one Priest and no Acolytes — moves quietly and reverently; and there is nothing to distract from the central interest. We are quite conscious, therefore, that morning by morning, we are offering a Sacrifice — the one Sacrifice forever which is the central act of worship of heaven and earth. Our joy overflows when we approach the Altar and are anew gathered to the life of our Lord through His self-impartation to us in the Bread of Life. Then are we able to repeat the experience of the Apostles, and eat our “meat with gladness and singleness of heart.”

This sense of the Presence, of having been made hosts of our Lord, Who has deigned to come under our roof, is what we strive to carry with us through the day. The spiritual strain of the Religious Life is in this — that it strives at constant recollection, to live each moment in the Divine Presence. Naturally, each moment literally cannot be consciously so lived; but we ap-

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proximate the ideal, and one feels that in some of the older Sisters, as in Sister Mary Martha, the ideal has become the real. The consciousness of God ever present is the aim of our devotional routine. The meditation puts us consciously in the Divine Presence for its time, and provides us with thoughts to occupy us during the day. The recitation of the frequent Offices carries on the continuous worship of the House. The times of intercession before the Altar which are a part of each Sister's daily offering is one other means of emphasizing the Perpetual Presence; and then the chinks of life, so to call them, are filled in by constant Acts of Recollection and of the Practice of the Presence of God. The life of the Religious is truly a life lived in the Divine Presence, and in those necessarily long portions of it when attention is fixed on that which is technically called *work*, there is still an undercurrent brought in from Mass and Meditation, from Office and Intercession, which is ready to break to the surface at any time in acts of ejaculatory prayer. The life of the Religious does actually approximate to the "pray without ceasing" of the Apostle.

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The Chapel is our true work-room — yes, the Mother Foundress was right. There is brought to us all the energy which we spend elsewhere. There come to us the light and guidance which are so needful if we are to keep our feet in the right way. The temptations of the life are very grave ones — we would be the last to underestimate them — and our power successfully to meet them is the supernatural power of a life hid with Christ in God. All that we are, all that we are enabled to accomplish, is begun here in the Chapel, where the bright sun-light, the ever-ready symbol of the present energy of God, streams in upon us, reminding us of the outshining of that which it symbolizes from the Altar and the Tabernacle, to fill the soul of the servant with the life of the Master.

VI

THE TABERNACLE

From the side of the Sanctuary, lifting a curtain, you pass into the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament. You are free to pass at any time; and if you go in, as I like to go in, in the late afternoon, you will find yourself quite dazzled with the splendor that is revealed. "Heaven," the Mother Foundress said, when we talked over the construction of the Chapel; "heaven is full of light. There is no night there, but the whole Presence glows and sparkles and quivers. 'God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.' And if the Lord God Himself was the source of light to the Heavenly City, so that it had 'no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof'; then surely the place of the earthly Presence, the Altar-throne of the Lamb, must be made splendid with the light too." So the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament

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blazes with gold and color, and the Tabernacle itself is like a myriad-colored gem. On either side of the Tabernacle kneels an Angel guard; and all about the walls kneeling Saints offer the emblems of their passion.

The Sisters are Sisters of perpetual intercession. Whenever you enter the Chapel of the Sacrament you will find one, often more, kneeling before the Tabernacle, offering to our Lord the intercessions of the Order. For it is not her private intercessions that the Sister is engaged in, but she kneels here as the representative of the Order offering its prayers to its Redeemer and Lord. The Sisters change quietly from hour to hour, but there is always one here; at no time of the day or night since the Chapel was consecrated has the hourly intercession failed. The Order intercedes always — that is its work.

It is the office of God our Savior, Who manifests Himself here upon our Altar, to offer Himself perpetually before the Throne set in the Heavens, the one Sacrifice forever for the sins of the world. All those who are in Him share in His offering; they

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are at once members of the Sacrifice which is offered and of the Priest who offers. We of St. Mary of the Hills wish to express our union with our Lord sacrificed and offered, by uniting our perpetual intercession to His Sacrifice. As we understand the Christian vocation, it is to offer one's self to be the instrument of the Divine action. The Christian is so united to Christ that Christ is able to act through him. But it would be but a one sided conception of the Christian life to think of it as the means of Christ's approach to our brethren; we think of it, too, as the means of the brethren's approach to Christ. We bring the needs of the world and of the Body before Him to receive cleansing and blessing.

In particular, this work of intercession is the work of Religious Orders. They have stripped themselves bare of the world in order that their time and energy may be unreservedly devoted to the work of prayer. The ultimate answer to the question, "What do Religious do?" is, "They pray." Their spiritual activity is the justification of their life. We meet the world's challenge squarely on that ground. When it asks us,

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“What are you doing for the world, for your brethren; on what ground can you defend yourself from the charge of living an idle and useless life?” we point to the Sister, kneeling at sun-rise, at high noon, at mid-night before the Tabernacle. We say, “There is our justification. You ask what we do for the needs of the world? We do this; we intercede constantly for its conversion and forgiveness, for its enlightenment and guidance.” There are different ways of looking at the usefulness of one man to another, and of man’s general usefulness in the world. Our judgment of what is useful depends on our prepossessions. In this Convent our prepossessions are spiritual—we believe that we live in a spiritual universe, governed by spiritual forces. We believe that prayer is a spiritual power so great as to effect changes in the material and spiritual worlds; produces, that is to say, results which without it would not have taken place. I say we believe this: it were more accurate to say that we know this. We have the evidence that our prayers have been answered over and over again. We know that they are constantly answered.

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When we say of a prayer that it was answered it may, no doubt, be replied that the alleged answer was merely coincidence. That will do as an answer once or twice or three times; but after that, as an explanation, it fails. If the marksman hits the center of the target once or twice it may be laid to accident; but if he hits it many times it is no accident. And if he hit it with only a considerable frequency we know that there is a relation between the hitting and his aim. After we have pursued the work of intercession before the Tabernacle for years we cannot be deceived as to the results. Among the prayers that the Sisters will find on their desk to-day to be offered to our Lord there will be too many thanksgivings to permit them to think that their labor of love has been in vain. And yet the thanksgivings are but one evidence of the power of prayer.

The kneeling Sister is only a symbol. She is by no means a complete embodiment of the intercessory power of the Order. I do not mean that the other Sisters as well as she are praying; that the prayers of the Order are offered at other times and places,

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in the Mass and in the Divine Office, for example. What I mean is, that the Order itself, and every member of it who keeps its Rule is a prayer, a perpetual sacrifice presented in union with the Sacrifice of our Lord. Our Lord's Sacrifice is not a past fact, it is a perpetual fact; and it is into the sacrificed life of our Lord that the Religious enters. In our Lord we are offering ourselves on behalf of our brethren — offering, not our prayers, but our lives. Sacrifice is the highest form of prayer, and the life of the Religious is a perpetual sacrifice.

“We of the Anglican Communion,” the Mother was saying the other day, “I greatly fear, have yet to learn the value of the contemplative life. Our entire social background, the whole of our education, is perpetually stressing action, by which is meant material action. Modern Western civilization is a scene of tremendously diversified energy, and the rush and hurry of those who are running the machines — or dodging them. I doubt very much if that civilization has any notion of where it is going. It is only the contemplative looker on who can judge of that — and there seem to be no

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contemplative onlookers. Every one is drawn into the machine; those who are not actively in it are only those who have been maimed in its service and thrown out to die by the road side. An industrial civilization has no pity for the man who cannot keep up, who falls out exhausted. Modern religion has become very much a part of the machine. It has much the same ideals of getting on, and much the same contempt for those who will not try to keep step with its march. The Church has given a grudging welcome to Religious Orders because, while it does not like their methods, or the atmosphere of mediævalism which hangs about them, it thinks it has discovered in them a form of cheap labor. It understands that. Those of us who are getting on in years have seen the ends of the earth ransacked to furnish cheap labor for the industrial mill. Well, in the Religious, the authorities think they have discovered people who will carry on hospitals and schools, orphanages and refuges, and do general parish work for their 'keep.' So they are willing to put up with oddities. The Religious have not much minded this misun-

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derstanding of their lives; they have smiled and gone on. The interpretation that the world or the Church puts on their life is not of much importance so long as they are enabled to offer the life itself. But the contemplative life will have another sort of reception. We shall have to begin to explain all over again."

"And yet we must have it." The speaker was Sister Mary Martha, and we hardly recognized her voice, so firmly and decidedly did she speak. As we looked around, interested, we saw that her face quite glowed. "The life of our Lord in the Church," she went on, "does not gain full expression while we are denying Him the means of the contemplative life. Just because of the nature of 'our material civilization do we need balancing means of spiritual expression. Because so few people pray, there is need that those who do pray should pray more. Because so many have no time or inclination to pray at all, we must find others to pray for them. Because man could not offer himself, our Lord came and offered Himself for him. To-day, the Church, which appears to have little time or energy left for

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religion, needs the contemplative life to balance its own unspirituality."

"You put it pretty strongly," the Mother said; "but I fancy we shall all agree with you. At present, I am quite sure that the most *useful* work that could be done in the Church would be the revival of the contemplative life. The trouble is that it is a work that cannot be done by any one who sees that it needs to be done, like starting a new guild for a needed work. It will only come when our Lord calls some one to begin it, or to strengthen and develop the few shoots that have been planted."

"I think," Sister Mary Martha replied, "that our Lord will raise up leaders in the contemplative life when those who feel the need of it act to the limit of their ability. We are a mixed order; but we have been able to carry on the work of perpetual intercession nevertheless. I remember that when we began it there were Sisters who felt that it would be too great a strain on us, and that we should never be able to carry it through. But never have we failed; and, in compensation, never has the joy of it failed us. To-day, I am quite safe in say-

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ing, there is not a Sister in the Order who would vote to abandon it."

It is true. The Church needs the contemplative life; it needs ever increasing numbers both of men and women whose lives are given to our Lord in perpetual acts of adoration and intercession. The fact that the Church shows small sign of wanting it is in itself a sign of its need of it. When leaders of the Church say: "Yes, the *active* life—there is no doubt a place in the modern Church for that; but we have no place in the twentieth century for so essentially a Mediæval conception as the contemplative life,"—then is the time to insist upon it. We cannot have too much prayer. And I do not mean what the modern person would most likely call *useful* prayer, that is, prayer for material things; but we need that prayer which is the merging of our will in the will of God through which there is effected a release of spiritual power into the world. Our present need as a Church is not the need of more luxurious church buildings or of larger and better equipped parish houses or of more commissions to investigate this or the other things; what the Church is in

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crying need of is more Saints. An appreciation of the value of sanctity on the part of the Church would do much to encourage us as to its future.

The very works of the Church need the contemplative life back of them. We think of the devoted men and women who are laboring ceaselessly in societies and institutions, in the work of spreading the Gospel among the heathen at home and abroad. St. Paul's description of his own experience is true of them; "In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." We try to picture the lives of these laborers: their loneliness, their discouragement, the depression which comes from coldness of reception and lack of sympathy. Whence comes the power to endure, to strive on amid all trials? Out of their prayers and communions, no doubt; but also out of the prayers and communions of others. This is one way in which we realize the Communion of Saints. The houses of contemplatives, if God gives them to us, will be *power-houses* whence is released the spiritual energy which sustains and heartens

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the workers of the active life. It is not necessary, in order to commend the active life, to depreciate the contemplative; nor is the contemplative life made acceptable by contrast with any other. In the unity of the Body there are many members and all have not the same office.

Here in St. Mary of the Hills we are doing what we can to pave the way for the contemplative life. We are sympathetic with vocations which look to a life of contemplation. We are not trying to suppress such vocations, or compress them into the already fixed forms of our work; but we are holding the frame-work of our life open so that there may be room in it for those with an obvious vocation to the life of adoration and intercession. In fact, we are rather favoring such vocations and giving them all encouragement. Therefore it is that in the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament you will commonly find, not only the Sister whose turn it is to represent the Order in the work of intercession, but you will find other Sisters who are drawn just by the love of our Lord to the place of His Presence. As I was saying, within the rigor of the daily

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routine we have maintained an element of freedom that this might be.

Access to the Tabernacle must be very free. The perpetual Presence of our Incarnate Lord with us is the inner strength of our lives. How wonderful this Chapel is — a very foretaste of heaven. If it were possible to write the spiritual history of this place, what a marvelous display of our Lord's dealings with human souls we should have. How many souls filled with doubt and hesitation have come in here and opened their trouble to Him and have gone forth refreshed. Aspirants who have come doubtful of their vocation have found clearness of conviction here. Novices who, as the time of their election approached, felt the assault of the final temptation — the temptation to give up and go back to the world — have sought refuge here. There has been unfolded before them in alluring colors all that they have left; the last beseeching letter of relation or friend has unsettled them; as from a high place they have seen the world and its glory; and then there was an hour, at night perhaps, here. The whole life was laid out before our Lord.

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There was a silent agony while the soul felt in the darkness for the hand that should guide it — and then there was a voice, the touch of a hand, a word, "Daughter, be of good cheer," and the cloud broke and the soul cried out with joy. Here before this Tabernacle souls have struggled with selfishness and rebellion; here temptations against charity have been met and fought out. Here, too, souls filled with inexpressible longing for our Lord have endured for days His silence. They have found Him, but when they tried to hold Him, "He made as though He would have gone further," and it was only the pathos of their prayers that held Him. Here many souls have found the secret of the Presence and have opened themselves so that He came in, not only to sup, but to abide. Sometimes as I kneel here, I think of all these struggles and aspirations ending in the joy of discovery. Then I know that this is more than "the gate of heaven," it is heaven itself.

The Tabernacle is the unique privilege of the Catholic Church. The elder church of the Jews had a certain manifested Presence

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of God; but we of the Catholic Church have the constant Presence of God manifested in our flesh. The Eucharistic life of our Lord is part of the condescension of His Incarnation. The all too common view of our Lord's life and work as having accomplished for us a deliverance in the past of which we now enjoy the fruits, is quite inconceivable to me. The work of our Lord is not like the work of our Revolutionary forefathers who sacrificed themselves in order to win our national independence, an inheritance upon which we enter with thankfulness, but with which our only concern is to enjoy it. Essentially, our Lord's work is one that has to be repeated in the experience of the individual. The redemption which He wrought for the race has to be by Him applied to each separate soul. The deliverance from the guilt and power of sin that His death made possible, has to be effected in me by *my deliverance*. What the Incarnate work of our Lord did was *to make God accessible* through means which theretofore had not existed. His Incarnate nature became a way of approach to God. But a way is useless to you unless

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you will walk in it; and all the offers of the Divine love are of no avail unless our will goes out to accept them. We have something to do beside remember what our Lord did: we have to become what our Lord is — to grow up into Him.

It is a part of His wonderful condescension that the means He has provided to enable us to do this are simple means within the reach of all. He wants to gather us to Himself; so He comes to us under sacramental elements. He wants to make easy our approach to Him in all our needs, with all our aspirations; so He vouchsafes His Presence in the Tabernacle. It is useless to say that there is nothing about the Tabernacle and Eucharistic worship in the Bible. The Catholic religion is not a religion of "the Bible only." What there is in the Bible is the story of our Lord's founding of the Church and of His promise to be with it until the end. But He had founded it and was in it before the promise was recorded. The Spirit Whom He sent from the Father to guide His Church into all the Truth, no doubt has done so. In particular, has He guided the development of the devotional

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life of the Church. It was not to be expected that a full-grown devotional practice should be in the possession of the Apostles on the morrow of Pentecost. It is not possible to hold that any one period of the Church has witnessed the explicit statement of all possible spiritual experience, or has attained to all that can be known of the various means and channels through which the life of the Spirit can function. No period of the Church can, in the nature of the case, assume to impose its spiritual experience as final, and assert the illegitimacy of further development. The *fact* of the Real Presence of our Lord in the Sacrament of the Altar is an unchangeable fact. There can be no adding to or subtracting from a fact. But the fact itself is capable, as the experience of the Church has shown, of many *uses*. There is no ground for saying that any of these uses is illegitimate because it cannot be shown to have existed at a certain date.

Attempts, therefore, to show that explicit devotions addressed to the Eucharistic Presence were not known at such and such a period in the life of the Church, seem to me

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to be profoundly uninteresting and wholly unimportant. If it be admitted that our Lord is personally present in the Blessed Sacrament, then His Divine Person is the legitimate object of worship. And that being so, details as to the form of worship can very well be left to the wisdom of the Church at any time. The Church's growing experience of the Presence may be expected to give rise from time to time to variations in the form of the worship of our Lord.

And surely the worship of our Lord present in the Reserved Sacrament is sufficiently rooted in the experience of the Church to require no defense. Certainly we do not think of defense here in this Chapel; if we did, the defense we should offer would be our experience. We should have to tell of the many hours of joy and peace spent here listening to the voice of our Lord's guidance, to the times when coming weary and heavy-laden we have found the truth of His promise to give us rest.

VII

THE SILENCE

The canterbury bells in Sister Etheldred's garden have rung midnight and I still sit at my window trying to write, but really looking out into the entrancing night. There is a full moon whose light overcomes and dims the stars. Yesterday there was a hot August rain, and to-day the sun has been sucking up the earth's moisture and the whole valley is now filled with white mist. The moonlight plays on this till it is silver in the open and purple in the shadows. Long dark shadows of pines stretch across the lawn. There is utter stillness save for the flutter of a pale green lunar moth at my window. In the garden there are long straight lines of white lilies, ghostly in the moonlight; they throw up to my window wave after wave of pungent odor.

Night and silence. What a gift of God silence is. It is impossible to think of sleep on such a night when, all the noises of earth

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being hushed, one can, undisturbed, give one's self to the full enjoyment of the beauty of the night. The soul consciously thrills and expands as at the near approach of some glorious experience. Then one understands that what this eagerness of soul means is its going forth to meet God. The veils of sense, which commonly hide God from us, have grown very thin; the disquietudes of this world which preoccupy our attention are absent, and there comes to us the conviction of the Presence, and our soul is filled with the ineffable mystery of its union with the Divine. Such moments of ecstatic quiet are the supreme moments of life.

So much I noted last night, sitting at my tower window till the moon set and the eastern sky flushed pink and amber and pearl with the coming of the dawn. It is at such moments that doors open for us and we understand spiritual values. From such night watches I come back to the routine of the Convent life feeling that I have penetrated deeper than ever before into the meaning of silence — this perfect quiet that wraps all our Convent for the greater part of the time. "Do you mean to say," the surprised

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visitor was asking the other day, "that during all these hours you say nothing; that you work together, sit in the same room together, and say nothing at all to one another? I should think you would be bored to death." So, no doubt, the unexperienced think. But the silence is the salvation of the Religious Life — without the silence it would be intolerable and impossible.

I think that when we come out of the Convent to mix with those who are living the ordinary life of men and women, the thing that afflicts us most is the empty chatter of life. The majority of the human race seem to love before all else the sound of their own voices. I came down from my hill-top not long ago, and was taken by a friend to hear a new opera — new to us, that is. Directly behind us sat a woman whose impulse of self-communication was so intense that she was utterly unable to keep silent for more than a few moments at a time, but constantly broke in upon the beauty of the music with the inane twaddle of her day's doings. One felt that it was the automatic flow of an undisciplined egoism. Social life is so impregnated with the convic-

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tion that all men and women must talk all the time, without reference to the value of the communication, that the social world seems, to a visiting hermit like myself, mere discordant noises — the endless tuning of an orchestra that never plays. I find myself more and more disinclined to say anything at all lest I should be merely adding to the meaningless volume of sound.

There appears to have come over the modern world a strange restlessness: it is like a child with a bad conscience — it cannot bear to be alone. Is it because of the increasing complexity of society that we have become so dependent upon one another? Has the habit of living in public resulted in an inability to live alone? So far as one can gather from reading the history of the past, the modern world appears unique in its inability to fill life pleasurably without the help of others. The modern person has to be amused by some one all the time. He flees quiet and seclusion and plunges into the crowd. He dreads loneliness more than anything else. Hence men press more and more into crowded centers of population, not because there are more or better working

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conditions to be found there, but because, when the day's work is over, there is the crowd in which to lose one's self ; there is the endless movement of life in which one can forget one's self. Less and less are human beings able to stand alone and meet life with the developed resources of their own spirits. I begin to think that one of the best evidences of a spiritual growth and strength is the desire of quiet, the eagerness to be alone, that there may be silence in one's life in which to listen to the inner voice undisturbed by the clamor of the multitude.

A Convent is about the only place left in the world where one can be assured of quiet. Here at St. Mary of the Hills we are particularly fortunate, for we are quiet without as well as within. There are, no doubt, all the multitudinous sounds of the natural world, but they do not disturb our silence because they are nature's hymn to God. They blend with the chants and hymns that drift out from the Chapel. We are as little disturbed by the wood-thrush who comes and joins in our Vespers as he is by us. We sing together to the glory of God and stimulate

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each other to a wholesome rivalry. But there are almost no human discords to break in upon us, no whirr or clank of machinery, no grind of street car wheels, no din of unmuffled engines, no rattle of trucks. Greatest blessing of all, there is no endless babble of human tongues ceaselessly engaged in retelling the wholly unimportant.

Those who lead the Religious Life keep silent the greater part of the day in order that they may live a life of recollectedness. The Religious strives to live constantly in the realized Presence of God; and she cannot do this if she is to be endlessly distracted by external things. She can preserve her recollectedness while her hands are busily occupied with work; she cannot at all preserve it, if she be exposed to the talk of companions. We are so constituted that we cannot attend to many things at once; our power of attention is a strictly limited power; and because that is so, the rule of the Religious undertakes to defend her from exterior distractions and to guard her from needless intrusions of the world about her.

The Religious enters the routine of the day by the door of Mass and Meditation.

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The Meditation is most important as setting the thought-tone of the day. It begins by bringing one into the Presence of God, and there guiding one to work out some thought about God that we may understand His purpose, especially His purpose for us, better. A Meditation might be described as a talk with God, so consciously are we aiming to get the light of the Holy Spirit's guidance upon the subject on which we are meditating. A Meditation is practically helpful in proportion as it is intensely personal. It is not a purely intellectual exercise, but is the exercise of all the elements of our personality. Unless the affections were stirred and the will influenced not much can have been accomplished. And while a well made Meditation ends in distinct personal considerations, which often take the form of explicit resolutions, the best effect of it will be lost if it be put behind us as a completed task when we arise from our knees after the final prayer. We should look forward to gathering the fruit of the Meditation all through the day. If we have gained practical thoughts from it, whether they are explicitly resolutions or not, we must watch for the

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opportunity to apply them as the day goes on. If my Meditation has revealed to me that I am increasingly yielding to irritation, and I accordingly resolve to overcome that temptation, I can only gather the fruit of the Meditation if all through the day I am watching myself in all my relations with others, and especially with those who have in the past been a source of temptation to me. In this attempt I need not only watchfulness, but freedom from distraction; and it is the rule of silence which will, more than anything else, aid me. In the midst of exterior quiet I can preserve interior watchfulness.

What is true of watchfulness against temptation is true also of such thoughts as require long brooding over for their fruitful development. Most of us take in new thoughts slowly: still more slowly do we find new depths in old thoughts, and new possibilities of application in familiar ones. Yet here is indicated a possible line of spiritual progress. We are apt to get stuck upon an old thought, and because we see something in it, imagine that we see all that there is. Here again is the value of constant meditation, it is the constant turning over

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of old thoughts in the hopes of finding a new content. The morning Meditation, perhaps, brings a ray of light through some rift we have found in the old thought; but the half-hour ends and we have no time to follow out the glimpses of thought we get. There again is the value of the silence. While we are performing some perfectly mechanical work we are able to go back to the glimpses of truth we caught this morning, and in the quiet hour that is ours get closer to its meaning. This would hardly be possible if it were permitted to any one at any time to break in upon our silence with remarks and questions which, whatever their value in themselves, would be wholly distracting and interrupting to the silent spiritual work that was going on in our souls.

To live constantly in the Divine Presence is the aim of the Religious, and to at all approximate to this idea there is required the most rigorous discipline of the thought. It is the misfortune of most of us that when we come to face the spiritual life with anything like a comprehension of what spiritual living means, we face it with a history of mental slovenliness which it is tremendously difficult

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to overcome. Hence the constant complaints of the hardness of meditation and of the prayer of silence and of other forms of devotion. The child of to-day is taught little enough self-control in any direction — self-control is the virtue of those who have to live with him. As for responsibility for thoughts, any obligation to control or direct them, that is not thought of. Our present view of thought seems to imply that thought has no consequences. No doubt action begins in thought, but such control as one may be held to is control at the moment when thought passes into action. But any one who has given attention to the matter must know that that is precisely the point where control is most difficult. To brood over a thought of revenge, for instance, to keep one's self in an excited state by the constant mental presentation of one's injury, to carry on an interior drama in which we successfully vindicate ourselves, and then, when, perhaps suddenly, presented with the opportunity of expression to expect successfully to hold ourselves in check, is absurd.

Moreover, from the point of view of spiritual growth, it is not only the uncon-

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trolled thought which is concerning itself with sinful imagination which is harmful. An uncontrolled thought tends to mental dissipation and degeneration. That the imagination should be permitted to wander about aimlessly most of the time, selecting its objects at random and without direction, can only result in an immense difficulty of control when we attempt to exercise it. The habit of attention, it turns out, has never been acquired. When we attempt to acquire it, we find that we have to overcome an already acquired habit of inattention. Our mind wanders, we say. It wanders because we have never required it to do anything else. And when it occurs to us that we have something for it to do, it is a most unwilling servant.

At the outset of any attempt at spiritual living has to be grasped this fact that we are responsible for our thoughts. Our Lord "knew what was in man," and His estimate of man did not wait on spoken word or act, but began with the reading of his thoughts. He warned us that "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphem-

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mies: these are the things which defile a man." "The word of God," it is noted, "is quick and powerful . . . and is the discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"; and that which is the legitimate offspring of the idle thought is the object of the Divine judgment: "I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment."

With a knowledge of the responsibility for thought goes a conviction of the necessity of control. The wandering thought must be disciplined to follow the direction imposed upon it by the will. To surrender to the wandering thought is in fact to abdicate the throne of personality and surrender the rule which belongs to the will. This is at once disastrous and absurd. There is no more meaning in saying, "I cannot help what I think," than there is in saying, "I cannot help what I do." Human law and custom hold us very sharply responsible for what we do. The trouble is, that they rather encourage us to believe that we have no responsibility for thought until it issues in act.

The silence of the Religious Life is at

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once a temptation and an opportunity. If the Postulant has any more than an elemental perception of the need of directing thought and of her responsibility for directing it, it is surprising. She has probably been accustomed for some time to make a Meditation, and through this practice has found the difficulty of mental control. But it is one thing to concentrate the attention on a given theme for twenty minutes, and quite another to have the silence of the Convent day stretch out before one. Here, certainly, is a wide field for wandering thought, for mere day-dreaming. What is worse is that it is a fertile field in which tares may develop. If one has a tendency to brood over fancied slights, to cherish envious thoughts, to self-pity, here is the ideal field for their cultivation. Here is the time for the temper to take one up into an exceeding high mountain and show the wonder of the world — that world that we are in the act of leaving. I am rather inclined to think the silence is the place of greatest temptation for the Postulant and Novice as yet untrained in the meeting of interior temptations. To “think over things” seems rather the nat-

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ural occupation of one who is as yet being tried and is not yet fully committed to the Religious Life. But it ought to be understood that the training of the Religious only begins after certain things have been settled. The Novitiate is not pure experiment. The woman who offers herself to the test of the Convent, is supposed to have settled certain elementary questions, among these that of her willingness to abandon the world at the call of our Lord. She is not supposed to picture herself as a Religious, either in the glass of self-pity as one who is suffering much for our Lord, or in that of self-admiration as one who deserves a great reward for the gift of life offered. When one is thinking about the Convent life for one's self, it is well to ask plainly what is the true prospect for one in the world. It will be found, I fancy, that most people are not giving up much that matters.

But if the silence involve a temptation, if it be an open field wherein the uncontrolled imagination may disport itself, it is also the field of opportunity for the mastery of thought. One sometimes concludes that many people think about whatever presents

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itself because they have nothing of their own to think about. But the Religious Life richly furnishes us with subjects for thought. Here is a great advantage. One's advice to people who complain of lack of control of thought is, Have something at hand to think about; keep certain subjects in stock, as it were, so that when you have a vacant hour, when you are going for a walk, you may have something on hand that you *want* to think about. And change your stock often as you find it is getting worn. The Religious has her subjects provided — the morning's Meditation, the last Instruction, the Principles of the Life and their particular applications.

But perhaps the greatest aid to control is interior prayer. Those who are leading a successful interior life, are leading it always in God's sight. One way in which this sense of the Presence is effected is by the perpetual offering of the things which are being done at the moment to our Lord. There is nothing so insignificant that it may not be so offered — the washing of a dish, the dusting of a room, the work about the Chapel. What is really needed in this matter is an

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active belief that our Lord is interested in us: unless we have this conviction our religion will be very perfunctory. But if we know that our Lord is really interested in us, we know that He is interested in everything that we do, in *how* we wash the dish or arrange the flowers for the Chapel. The test of our love of any one is in our interest in all that they do. Our Lord's love is one of minute interest; and the adequate answer is that we offer to Him whatever we are doing, which means that we do it recollectedly as in His sight.

As there are always many things we need to think out, so are there many objects of prayer which we may hold in readiness to occupy us. There are all sorts of persons and things for which we may intercede. It is well, in the case of the unskilled, to throw a good deal of variety into the interior activity. One of the causes of our failures in interior control, in wandering in prayer and meditation, is failure to observe the elementary fact that it is impossible to hold the mind fixed on any subject for any great length of time without its swinging off. The time of our attention is proportioned to

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our active interest; but only the most intense interest can hold the mind tense for long. In cases of quite ordinary interest it tends to fall away from the subject after a very short time. The way to meet this difficulty is, not to regard it as an expression of sin, and struggle against it; but to understand that it is quite natural and to meet it naturally. When the mind tends to wander from a subject, *let it go*: relax completely for a moment that the mind may rest, and then it can easily be swung back to the subject we are thinking out.

It is by facing the difficulties engendered by the untrained mind and by seeking their cure by the application of proper means, that we find the problem raised by our lack of mental discipline is not at all a hopeless one. "Perhaps it is an odd thing to say," Sister Ursula remarked the other day when we were talking of this matter of recollection, "but if I understand what went on in my own case, it was that I gained control of myself when I became interested in our Lord. I discovered after I had been a Novice for a while that I had never been really interested in Him. I had been interested in learning

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about Him, I had been interested in what I had thought work for Him, but never directly in Him. When this personal interest came I was wonderfully changed and helped. Because I was interested in our Lord I *wanted* to think about Him and to talk to Him; and I wanted to interest others in Him, and to bring His love and power to bear on them." That, no doubt, is the secret. We do not find much trouble when we have got to the steady experience of a personal interest in our Lord.

VIII

IN THE LIBRARY

The Sister Librarian sits at her desk engaged in playing the card catalogue game. It appears to be a game of a terrible fascination; everybody is playing it. There is a certain fascinated seriousness about the faces of its devotees which we never see in other human beings — the card catalogue face can be recognized anywhere. When one goes into any place of business nowadays, one feels an eye fixed on one with a mild glare, and hears the shuffle of the cards, and knows that one is being "looked up." When one goes to a physician or a dentist or a barber one is asked a multitude of questions, the secret recesses of one's family history and character are probed, and all the details are entered upon a card and filed. It is horrible to think in how many places in this world one's record is filed — in banks, in doctors' offices, in rectors' studies. I am gradually arriving at the conclusion that there is some-

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thing *magical* in all this. Taking a record and filing you in a card catalogue is the modern equivalent of the mediæval practice of taking your horoscope. I am quite certain that the charity official who has got the applicant for relief properly entered on the index goes about the indexing of the next case with a satisfied glow of one who has fulfilled his duty to his neighbors; and I am very certain that my physician, when he has called to his secretary to bring my record and has added another entry to it, is convinced that he has notably advanced my cure.

I know that this is an inexcusable digression, but it was suggested to me by the mental picture that I have of the Sister Librarian sitting behind her desk and playing the card game as aforesaid. She looks at me with a mild air of protest as of one unreasonably disturbed in an important occupation. Then she smiles and gets up and says, "I have just received a number of books that I think will interest you." Now, if there is anything I dislike, it is having my reading directed, and I always have a perhaps unjustifiable, feeling that the Sister

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Librarian does not altogether approve of what I read and tries to turn my mind to better things. I cannot help the conviction that she pores over my card record from time to time and shakes her head in disapproval. So I receive her seemingly harmless suggestion about the new books with the inner revolt of one who is conscious of being disciplined for his own good. If I could sometime get into the Library unseen there is *one* card record that would be missing the next time it was looked for. After all, why should I not read novels, if they interest me?

But that is only a trivial matter after all. Perhaps I ought not to speak of it. The fact is that the Sister Librarian and I are very good friends and have many interesting talks on books and the work of the Library. It is a large lending library and two or three Sisters are kept busy most of the time with correspondence and other work about it. These Sisters have to be very well informed in the matter of ecclesiastical literature; but it is one of the points of our Order that it does all it can to encourage the intellectual life of its members. We want

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learned Sisters. That is one of the facts about us that will appeal to the public, I fancy. The one thing that the average man seems to know about the Religious Orders is that they "preserved the learning of the past during the Dark Ages." I sat with a fellow-citizen the other day in train from Albany to New York. He was a Westerner and had never been down the Hudson before. As we passed Holy Cross I pointed to the buildings and said, "That is a Monastery." "A Monastery," he exclaimed; "I do not see what use they can be now. In the Dark Ages, I know, they preserved the learning of the past. But what can they do now?" I explained, as the thing that would most probably appeal to a man from Arkansas that they keep schools — and he seemed satisfied.

We hold that the Religious should be learned, if possible, and should intelligently foster learning. Of course, what we are concerned with are those branches of learning which are more especially ecclesiastical. Our Library is large, and we welcome those who want to spend some time in special research; but we reach a much larger class by the circulation of our books. The other day

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I found the Sister Librarian packing up an unusual number of books, and she explained that they were going to a school to provide some reading courses for the children. "The reading of children is very important," she said, with the air of one who had just made an interesting discovery. I replied that I was glad that some one had made that discovery, as my observation was that most children were left very much to themselves in the matter of reading as though it were of no more importance what books they read than what games they played. "They can be taught to read good books," the Sister Librarian said with conviction. She doubtless sends out good books — but do the children read them, read them voluntarily, I mean?

The religious education of children is a fascinating and perplexing subject. There is, for one thing, the extraordinary course of the education of Christian children to-day: it is education in anything but Christianity. The Church at the beginning, for some reason I have never understood, took over the heathen educational system and made it its own. It never so much as substituted

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Christian text-books for heathen. It took Plato and Aristotle to its bosom. In the Middle Ages this didn't so much matter as there was always the corrective of an active Christianity about the child. But to-day this has largely vanished. The Christian boy or girl is now sent to the college that is secular, and where, not only the subject they are taught is presented without reference to Christianity, but the teacher is most likely not a Christian. That this system exists and flourishes is to me the clearest indication of the deadness of our religion.

Then there is the difficulty of the child himself. He has to have the books of his own time. It doesn't make any difference how wonderful the book of the past generation was, he is not interested in it. Whatever interests him must have been written the day before yesterday at the farthest. The child is the most ultra-modern of beings. The literature of the past is dead to him, after he gets beyond the interest of fairy-tales. The problem of the child's religion is, therefore, to secure books, not which teach religion, but which *assume* religion, which are saturated with the Chris-

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tian point of view in the presentation of life; and to secure these books over again each generation. The non-Christian world, of course, has no difficulty in presenting itself because it is nothing more than the contemporary life of which the child is a part, and in which he is, therefore, deeply interested. But religion is not obviously a part of this world; how then present it in terms of a life which mostly ignores it? So I am afraid our Sister Librarian's package of books will not solve the problem of the religious training of the young. Incidentally, in the educational world, we seem to spend most of our time running around after our tails; if we had sufficient religion we could teach the next generation to be religious, and if we could train the coming generation to be religious we should acquire sufficient religion.

At present, teaching religion, means teaching select individuals who have in some way discovered their need and want to be taught. It is to these that our Library largely ministers. From all over the country men and women write to us for advice as to books and courses of study. They would like to know

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about this or that subject or point. Can we advise them as to a course of reading? Can we supply the books? Yes, we can. That is what we are here for. Our expert Sisters can lay out a course on a Biblical or theological or historical subject, and send the books; they can, if necessary, give examinations. "I want to look up the question of the people's access to the Scriptures before the Reformation," a man writes; and a list of passages is sent. If he cannot find the books in the local library, they are sent. "How would you advise me to go about teaching my little boy the Bible?" an anxious mother writes; and again there is a letter of detailed advice.

The Sister Librarian, returning again to the matter of teaching children, which is her hobby, replied the other day to some doubts of mine, "The difficulty of teaching a child religion is not at all," she said, "the difficulty of the child, but the difficulty of the teacher. In fact, you do not have to teach a child religion; he is religious by nature. You have simply to direct his religious impulses. The difficulty is the difficulty of finding any one who can teach him. The

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root of the failure of our school system of education is the same. A true teacher — a teacher who can truly teach — is a rare person; and our educational system requires that they exist by the hundred thousand. They do not: and good intentions do not make up for lack of capacity. In this matter of leading a child to intelligent interest in the Christian Church, if you can find a person who can teach, the child has the interest ready-made. But why should you expect a child to be interested in a bore? A child will be just as interested in the Old Testament stories as in the stories of Homer, if you can get any one to tell them so that they may be expected to interest any human being. There are no more fascinating, or, to use the boys' word, exciting, stories than those of Christian heroism, of missionary adventure. Only they must be *told*. And they must be *part of the general interest of life*. It is hopeless to expect a child to be interested in religion, through now and then telling him a story, no matter how interesting the story may be, if the interest do not fit into his whole life. If he find that the family to which he belongs is profoundly un-

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interested, as a whole, in religion; and that he, for some reason, is picked out to be the subject of religious instruction which is obviously being given him, not because it is thought important, but because he is a child, he will not be impressed."

Still, however difficult the task under present conditions, we shall go on teaching with hopefulness. And, not only teaching children, but adults. Sister Hildegard, indeed, feels that the situation is distinctly hopeful. She gives it as her experience that there is a great desire for religion. We talked it over not long ago, and she gave it as her opinion that the numerous experiments which are being made in religion are driving people to the conclusion that a religion which after so long existence is still utterly uncertain of itself is a failure.

"Modern Protestantism," she said, "is giving the impression that nothing that we have considered religion in the past really matters. It has not only thrown over historic Christianity, but it is now engaged in the rapid abandonment of its own traditions. The Fathers of the Reformation would

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stand aghast at the utterances of their offspring. The consequence is that a very large element in Protestantism is seeking for some sort of stable religion; they are delighted when they find it. We have some difficulty in reaching them because they are firmly convinced that we are mere formalists."

I told the Sister of an amusing experience of my own which befell me not long ago. I was staying with a friend at a Summer resort. One day a stranger, an old man whom we had noticed as a new comer, followed us out of the hotel after dinner, and, without any sort of preface, asked, "Does the Episcopal Church believe anything?" We replied that it still had a Creed which we thought most of its members said without mental reservation. The old gentleman continued: "I am a deacon in the Congregational church in H——. We do not believe in anything any more, except efficiency. We are becoming efficient." It was a year after this, and I had quite forgotten the episode, when the old man burst into my room one day, and again without preliminaries, an-

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nounced, "I am in the Church! I am in the Church! *There is nothing too high for me!*"

"Amusing as that is on the surface," the Sister said, "imagine the mental and spiritual wrench that lay back of it. Picture this Orthodox Protestant New Englander, growing old in the steady practice of the faith he had been brought up in, finding it abruptly torn from under his feet, and a fussy system of good works substituted. And he had been brought up to abhor good works! The country is full of such tragedies to-day, and ours is the opportunity of finding them and ministering to them. It is slow work; but at present it is the hopeful work before us. And work with individuals is so helpful."

The Reverend Mother has given a good deal of thought to the training of Sisters to fulfill this vocation to individual souls. We have talked about the matter a good deal, and I feel certain of her point of view. The dogmatic approach to souls is apt to be a mistake and a failure. The perplexed person, even though he need a definite Creed to straighten him out, does not commonly think so, and the abrupt offer of a Creed is apt to

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repel. And that is especially true in our case because of his rooted notion that all that we think about is the externals of things. The approach must be along the line of personal religion, opening to the confused mind the boundless riches of the Catholic devotional life.

Hence the training of our Sisters contains a very large element of instruction in Ascetic Theology. When once one has got over the crude imagination that the spiritual cannot be, and does not need to be, taught and has found that the spiritual life is a fine art to be acquired with the same sort of study and care as any other art, one settles down to the study of it, and that study is the study of Ascetics. There is an art of prayer, and there are various modes of prayer; one may have more or less practical use of them, and yet not have mastered them in a way that makes one a good interpreter of them. We meet, for example, a person who gives us her confidence and tells us of the difficulties that she has with prayer. It turns out that she is struggling with the ordinary difficulties of the prayer of petition. When we ask about meditation we find that she has never tried

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to make a meditation and knows nothing about it. Even less does she know anything about the more advanced forms of prayer. Now, one has, no doubt, learned to make one's own meditation; and also one has learned to make it in a special way. If one knows nothing about the theory of meditation and the various modes of practice, one will simply attempt to reproduce one's own practice in some one else, quite regardless of the personal equation. Here is the necessity of training in Ascetic Theology. The trained person can apply to the individual case the general theory. He can meet difficulties as they present themselves by such variations of the theory as are suited to the circumstances. So it is in other spiritual exercises; other things being equal, that person will advance best and most rapidly who is best trained in the theory of the spiritual life.

Our Library has not been very long in accumulating, but it is wonderful how complete it is on certain lines. The Ascetical section is especially rich. It is one of the perplexing things in life, to face the fact of the immense amount of consecrated labor

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that has been spent on the science of the Spiritual Life, and the relatively small fruitage, so far as one can see, that has resulted. Here are rows on rows of books in which are chronicled the wisdom and experience of successive generations of Christians in the matter of spiritual living. They are of no one time or language; they have been gathering from the beginnings of Christianity, and they are still accumulating. One would think that to Christians they would be the most fascinating of all books. They throb with personal experience of those who have lived in the closest union with our Lord. They are wise with the wisdom of all the Christian centuries. They are the chronicles of the tragedies and triumphs of the soul. They are the histories of the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet with the exception of a few specialists, ruining their eyes in the dimness of monastic libraries, they are unknown.

If that be the fact, what good can come from the studies of a few experts in a forgotten literature? This good: the problems they deal with are not forgotten, but are the ever recurring problems of the spiritual life. Most of men's dealings with those problems

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to-day, most of the dealings even of the men who are supposedly prepared in seminaries to deal with them, is the rawest experimentation. What would one think of a class of physicians commissioned to practice in any community, who had never been instructed in any practical application of medical theory; who had never been required to diagnose cases, but had begun and ended their education by reading about diseases in a dictionary? We, in this Convent, want those who have to deal with souls to have had the advantage of all possible training for their responsible work; in particular, we want them to be familiar with the spiritual experience of the past. We believe that it is quite as possible to diagnose a spiritual case as a physical one; but it needs the expert to do it.

It is because we have so neglected the spiritual treasures of the Christian past that the modern world has so largely forgotten that there is a Christian way of looking at life. We cannot spend many hours in this Library without becoming conscious of the difference in the point of view of these spiritual writers and, let us say, the point of

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view which will lie back of our daily paper. St. Paul states the distinction clearly enough: "Now we received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual discerneth all things, yet he himself is discerned of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ." That is the judgment that these old writers pass on life. It is the judgment of those who are alive to spiritual values; who discern in the various facts experience offers them, those which are congruous with their spiritual aspirations and those which are not. Too often, the modern Christian is a wholly uninstructed person who is hardly familiar with a limited spiritual vocabulary; who has but a shallow

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spiritual experience; and has no conception of how that experience might be deepened, even were he desirous of so doing. Usually this is not his own fault; he is the victim of a system of training which has ignored spiritual values, which, indeed, has been hardly conscious of them as things which it is its business to teach. This system, if such it can be called, has imagined that Christianity is identical with what it calls "a good life"; by which it appears to mean conformity to the moral conventions of the circle in which any one moves. As that is usually a quite respectable circle, the moral standard is most likely high in respect to sins which are clearly opposed to its interests. Sins of violence and sins against property it will forcibly condemn. To sins of selfishness and self-indulgence it will be singularly tolerant. It will resent the plain truth that neither its goodness nor its badness have any vital relation to the Christian religion — that they are purely social customs resting on social approval and disapproval.

Can this society be taught to distinguish the Christian life from other lives? At least, we can try. We do not give up in de-

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spair. We recognize it to be our function as Religious to go on trying to the end. We do not know what the outcome is to be; but we do know what our obligation is. It is first of all an obligation to take a clear view of the case, to judge it calmly and dispassionately; and then to offer the remedy. *We are perfectly certain that we have the remedy.* The generations of Saints have not lived in vain. They have mastered the problem of human living; they have, in their own lives, triumphed over all difficulties; and they have, in their writings, left us the record of their experience, that we, learning from them, might become skilled physicians of the spirit.

IX

THE LIFE OF SACRIFICE

These October days are terribly exciting — I find it difficult to settle down and go steadily at my work. People talk about the quiet, serene Autumn days. You might as well talk of a quiet, serene battle-field. Nature is dying dramatically, tragically, the woods agonize in a mad struggle of flaming color. I have just come in from a walk along a country road where all sorts of trees and bushes and vines were in their death flush. I do not care much for this spectacle in the mass. It is senselessly gorgeous, a mere debauch of color. Looking out from my tower on to the plain the effect is as though a child-giant had been given a new paint box and been permitted to color the place as he would — you feel that the child was not satisfied until he had tried every color in the box. But if one takes a sample, as it were, and studies it in detail, the effect produced is different. On my walk I could

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confine myself to the study of the roadside. Wonderful! How does Nature manage to manufacture so many colors? There was a marvelous patch of sumach, all crimson and green, and rising out of the very center of it a group of slender sassafras trees, the leaves of which ran the whole gamut of yellow up to deep tawny orange. There are still left clumps of purple asters showing against a tangle of woodbine. I came back saturated with color, and, looking out from my window, saw an old oak which has declined to turn a leaf. What an obstinate thing an oak tree is! In the Spring, it refuses to put out a leaf till most of the trees have arrayed themselves for the warm season; now it holds to the green of its leaves while others are fully clothed in the Autumn fashion. By and by it will turn to all conceivable tints of red, from the very lightest red to the deepest mahogany; but it will refuse to drop its leaves all Winter. It insists upon being different.

Now and then there is a person like that who manages to get into the Novitiate. One lets them in because there doesn't seem to be any reason why they should be kept out.

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There is never any very obvious criticism to be passed upon them. But they are always different. They attempt to merge their lives in a society, but they cannot. If they have any religious vocation at all it is to be hermits. They do not object to anything that they are asked to do, but it is never possible for them to do it in quite the way in which the other Sisters do it, or to do it at just the time at which it has been directed. Temperamentally, they are arrant individualists who never will succeed in fitting in to any scheme of a common life. So after a few months' struggle they will be sent away. The chances are that they will be quite unable to understand why they have been found impossible.

Here, within Convent walls, little things count immensely; and the person who cannot keep a rule, who has no sense of time or order, or of the rights and convenience of others, has no place here. The Rule is the test of all such; if they cannot see that the peace and quietness of a house depends upon punctilious observance of the Rule, they have not caught the meaning of a common life. The root trouble in such persons would seem

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to be that they have never been able to construe life in terms of sacrifice; and, of course, unless one can do that, the Religious Life will always remain a mystery. /

For Sacrifice is at the center of it. When those without the gates question about the life, the vows are almost always the stumbling-block. Why life vows? They say that they can understand people living together for the attainment of common purposes; they can even understand that the prosecution of common purposes requires the regulation of a Rule; but what they cannot understand is why life vows should be necessary. That saying, of course, demonstrates that they have not understood; that they are still looking upon the Religious Life as a form of service rather than as a form of life. They have not grasped it as *Sacrifice*. But until you have grasped the Religious Life as sacrifice, you have not grasped it at all.

The vows of the Religious are not simply restraints and limitations of individual action which have been found wise if the ends of a common life are to be attained. The Vocation of a Religious is the vocation of a sacrificed life, a life placed utterly at our Lord's

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disposal with nothing reserved for self. And inasmuch as the Incarnate Life of our Lord is the supreme expression and model of the sacrificed life, it is natural that the Religious Life should follow the lines of our Lord's life; that as He emptied Himself of His glory and took the form of a slave for the accomplishment of the ends of the Incarnation, so should those who are called to follow Him in the Religious Life detach themselves utterly from earthly goods by the vow of Poverty. As He is the supreme expression of the virgin life, so they follow in His steps by the vow of Chastity. As He came to do not His own will but the will of Him Who sent Him, so the Religious abandons her own will in the vow of Obedience. Conformity to the utter sacrifice of our Lord is what is sought.

Of course, Sacrifice is not the peculiar obligation of the Religious Life. It is only that the Religious Life is one form that the sacrificed life takes. I suppose that quite the hardest task that the human being finds in his attempt to understand Christianity, is the necessity of understanding it as sacrifice. The whole of the modern revolt

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against Christianity is there. The young, just facing the possibilities of life, see opening before them infinite opportunities for self-indulgence and self-gratification. The demands that religion makes upon them for self-restraint and discrimination in the use of the world, its demands that the impulses of nature shall be subjected to control and discipline, are to them an intolerable interference with the liberty of action wherewith Nature has endowed them. Their temptation is to reject religion as an impertinent interference. The temptation to religion is to deny its own essential nature and to present itself as something other than sacrifice. That is a temptation that religion has very widely yielded to. In some cases it denies that asceticism, spiritual discipline, is any necessary part of its teaching; that all that it need require of its votaries is to keep within the limits of customary morality: in other cases, it distinguishes types of life, and holds that asceticism is a special vocation; that some children of the kingdom are called to sanctity and a sacrificed life, and others to live as "ordinary Christians"—whatever that may mean.

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One effect of this is to make the Religious Life unintelligible, because it is in reality related to nothing in the common life of Christians. Its Sacrifice is not a fundamental demand of Christianity upon every member of the Household of Faith, the sacrifice of the Religious is an isolated phenomenon, and like isolated phenomena, unintelligible. From the point of view of the greater part of the Christian community, the Religious is a sport, a freak. But if it be once understood that the common life of Christians is a life of sacrifice, then a special type of the sacrificed life will be intelligible through its relation to the common life of the Body. To understand the Religious Life at all, then, it is necessary to understand that all Christian vocation is a vocation to union with our Lord, and that union with Him involves the sharing of His experience; that no more than the life of his Master is the life of the servant for himself. He does not face life, like a child of this world, as a field of the widest possible self-indulgence; but he faces it as the redeemed child of God, as a field for the service of his Father. Life is not an instrument of self-indulgence, but

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the instrument of self-discipline. What he receives, he receives in trust; he receives as the material upon which he must work in the service of God.

I say, the hitherto insuperable difficulty of religion has been to make any great number of human beings at any one time understand this. "Why should I not use the world to the limit?" is the challenge that is thrown at the Christian ideal by each succeeding generation. Now the true answer is, and the Church when faithful to its mission has always given it, that to use the world to the limit is to put one's self on the level of the beast, and to sacrifice the permanent and higher possibilities of life: it is to act as foolishly as the child who, to gratify a passing impulse, breaks his toys, and then cries because he has no means of amusement.

For the spiritual interpretation of life maintains that spiritual and eternal values can only be reached through the sacrifice of material and temporal values. It is a question of what we want; and it is merely silly to suppose that we can have both. Balaam, with his pious desire to die the death of the righteous, but with no will to

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approach it through the life of the righteous, is typical of a vast mass of invertebrate Christians who fill the world with their lamentations over the hardness of the demands of religion, and show themselves quite incapable of comprehending the meaning of discipleship of a crucified Master. Teachers of the religion of Jesus must insist upon the centrality of the Cross in that religion no matter at what cost of the alienation of the worldly and self-indulgent. For it is not fair to the self-indulgent themselves to permit them to believe that they are living a Christian life, only that they are not so strict as some of their neighbors. And when men have come to understand what the Cross means in the life of each and every disciple of Christ; that it is the necessary manifestation of a life in union with Him; when they have ceased to think it possible to find a mode of service which is not also a mode of sacrifice; then they will be prepared to understand certain lives as the expression of certain forms of sacrifice, as growing naturally out of the normal form of Christian life, and not as being

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unintelligible oddities without any relation to every day Christian living.

The vows of the Religious are the expression of the completeness of her sacrifice. She has held nothing back, but has heeded the Divine exhortation and sold all and followed. Every part of her complex nature is involved in her offering of herself. There is no withholding part of the price; whatever our Lord purchased with His Blood is brought to Him and surrendered.

We should quite miss the meaning of the vows if we did not seek it below the surface. They have often been misunderstood because they have been thought a meaningless renunciation of the gifts of God, the sterilizing of a nature of which the normal and legitimate end is fruitfulness. It is the blunder of all superficial dealings with the Christian religion: ill informed interpreters are constantly taking its prohibitions as ends in themselves and therefore meaningless. Now no Christian prohibition is an end in itself — a purely negative thing. There is nothing arbitrary about them. They all have positive meanings. So it is with the

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vows of the Religious. They are not simply fences to prevent the Religious from straying into forbidden ways, rather are they the removal of obstructions which existing, would effectively prevent certain kinds of development. The land of the colonist has to be cleared before it can be cultivated; and the clearing process does not at all imply that what is being removed is in itself an undesirable thing. It is a very good thing, oftentimes; but it is undesirable at that time and in that place and relative to a certain work which it is proposed to accomplish. So the vows of the Religious do not imply a criticism of the Sacrament of Matrimony, or of the institution of property, or of the Divine endowment of free-will. They simply assert that, reference being had to certain ends to which a given person is called, those ends will be attained by that person by the voluntary surrender of certain normal rights of life. In other words, the Religious is called to a specific sort of union with our Lord, which is to be attained by the complete sacrifice of self to Him of which the vows are the symbol.

For again it must be asserted that the

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naked meaning of the vows is the smallest part of their meaning. The significance of the vow of Chastity is not exhausted by the overcoming of passion and the living of a physically pure life. Physical purity is the symbol of the purity of soul which is the medium of the Divine vision. The soul which is preoccupied with the life of the senses will find great difficulty in attaining to a realized union with our Lord: it finds that the closer it grows in union, the less the life of the senses attracts. As we grow closer to our Lord, the less stress we are inclined to lay on what we eat and drink and wear. We understand that "the life is more than meat, and the body than raiment," and therefore learn to make even our eating and drinking the instrument of a Divine purpose, and whether we eat or drink "do all to the glory of God." The Religious is called to a mode of life in which this subordination of the flesh to the spirit, this transformation of material acts to be the instruments of a spiritual purpose, has been carried to the farthest possible point. Every one knows, or may know, the value of self-control in the matter of natural ap-

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petites in clearing the intellectual and spiritual eyes from the mists of the material. This which most of us find an occasional practice, the Religious seeks to make the normal state of life. The eyes of the soul being habitually closed earthward, are open for the glory which shall be revealed for the pure in heart. In the field of possible interests certain have to be selected, as the amount of our attention is limited. It is thus that we become specialists. The Religious is a specialist in the unseen things which are eternal.

Similarly, the vow of Poverty is a mode of sacrifice. It marks the withdrawal of the Religious from the competitions of worldly life. But it is a withdrawal that she may have the freedom of her Master in the prosecution of His mission. There is a profound meaning in the fact that our Lord willed to be born *poor*. And that meaning would not seem to be that poverty is in itself better than any other state of life, but it would seem to lie in this, that he who has accepted a state of poverty has achieved a freedom which he could not otherwise attain. The Jews looked for a

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king, but to have been born in the royal state would have imposed limits on action and influence that, so far as one can see, would have made our Lord's work impossible. If our Lord had been born in the state the Jews imagined for Him, He would have had to have been the sort of Messiah they imagined. As poor, our Lord was free. Poverty is the only real freedom, because we become the slaves of our possessions; and poverty is no limitation upon one's usefulness unless one is seeking a material usefulness. It was because our Lord possessed nothing and had nowhere to lay His head that He was able to present us with a mission of such wonderful variety. A rich Messiah is inconceivable: a rich Church ought to be.

But it was found impossible in practice for the Christian community to hold to the position of poverty and a common life. It could not detach itself from the slavery of things. So it became the function of the Religious Life to continue the tradition of the Christ life. It repeats, under its limitations, the first Christian family, that which consisted of our Lord and His Apostles.

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It is a question whether the solution of the continual perplexities of the Christian in relation to the world does not lie in the direction of such groups.

But as the Religious Life exists, its vow of Poverty is the symbol of its acceptance of the Christ life of poverty and dependence. The Religious has no possessions. She has sacrificed the human craving for things of one's own. She must ask for everything she has. The clothes she wears, the food she eats, are not hers; they come from the common stock. So she learns the great lesson of dependence upon the Providence of God, not being anxious because of her constant trust in the Father. Again, as in the matter of Chastity, the reduction of life to the least possible dependence upon the material is found to be the road to freedom. The freedom of which the world talks so much and so tenaciously clings to, is freedom of self-expression, freedom to overcome competitors and to acquire, which ends in the man's becoming the servant of what he does. In the Religious Life, freedom means release of thought and energy through the sacrifice of that other sort of freedom, and

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the acquisition of the power to sacrifice one's self, to become the instrument of the purposes of God. It is only, it turns out, when we have nothing, that we possess all things.

As has often been pointed out by the masters of the Religious Life, it is the vow of Obedience which gives to the common life its true character. The other virtues of the Religious — Chastity and Poverty — can be practiced under circumstances other than those of a Religious Order. They are often, to an extent no doubt greater than we suspect, practiced by people in the world. But while one can seek the ends of Chastity and Poverty in isolation from one's fellows — isolation physical or moral — one can only obey in a common life. The vow of Obedience is the sacrifice of the innermost and most cherished recesses of one's life. It is the putting of the direction of that life in the hands of another, to live from day to day in dependence upon a will outside one's self. It is the crux of the Religious Life. It is the rock upon which many a well-meaning Novice makes shipwreck. Yet it can be safely said that no one can make a good Religious

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except as she can develop the capacity to obey.

One feels the revolt of the whole modern world against this vow of Obedience. Obedience is no longer a virtue anywhere else. Self-determination, which is only another word for self-will, is the watchword of to-day. But we may remember that the Religious Life is not of to-day, but is of the timeless life of the Body of Christ. In this matter we have not to take our impulse from modern political and educational theories — theories which will have their little day and pass — but from the example of Incarnate GOD Who “came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me,” and whose meat it was “to do the will of him that sent him, and to finish his work,” and Who, at the supreme crisis of His life, surrendered Himself utterly to the will of the Father, saying, “Not my will, but thine, be done.” That example is what rules the Religious Life and not the modern theory of individual liberty. What is valuable about our liberty is the power that it gives us to offer ourselves to the love of our Lord.

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And that is what the Religious does. She does not surrender her liberty to the caprice of some one else as a mere matter of self-mortification; what she surrenders herself to is the will of our Lord as expressed for her through the will of her Order. Her Order becomes to her the means of the revelation of the Divine will. There is, no doubt, room, as in all human institutions, for the abuse of governing power. Superiors may act unreasonably and capriciously; but that is far from being usual, and when it occurs it is soon corrected by the united mind of the Order. It is this *mind of the Order* which is important. Each Religious Order soon comes to have a peculiar will and purpose which it is seeking to exercise through its members; and it is to this will and purpose that the Religious surrenders herself.

And in that surrender is found the peace of the Religious Life. When one tries to understand the causes of restlessness as one finds them in the world, it is most often that we find them to lie in the capriciousness and uncertainty of our wills; it is just that freedom to which we so tenaciously cling

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that is the root and ground of our restlessness. The wonderful calm and stability of our Lord's life is discovered in its union with the will of the Father. The same thing is true of the peace of the life of the Saints. Their peace is that of those who have given themselves to the will of God, and have found in the giving that they have lost nothing, but rather gained — that they have passed “from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

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Winter again. The trees have undressed and you are able to understand their beauty — the beauty of pure form. The pines, to be sure, never undress, but they have a beauty of another order, peculiar to themselves. They have been wonderful this week. We have had our first snowstorm — a wet, heavy snow. When we looked out in the morning we found the hemlocks and the pines bowed to the breaking point under their white burden. All the trunks of the trees were white on the side from which the snow came; and to look out into the forest was to look down aisles of white pillars supporting green and white arches. One could only sit silent in the presence of so much beauty. And then the wind came and destroyed it all; no, not destroyed it, for it will always remain printed on our memory. I like to think that amid the beauty of heaven which, no doubt, will be

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quite other than any beauty we have known here, we shall still retain the memory of these earthly manifestations of the Divine beauty which have been so large an element in our training for the perception of that higher beauty. Perhaps as we stand by the "sea of glass like unto crystal," we shall remember some day when we stood by the shore of an earthly sea, and saw the waves dash themselves into spray on the rock beneath us. Perhaps as we look on the trees of Life with their twelve manners of fruit and their healing leaves, we shall recall the pine trees bending under the weight of the newly fallen snow. There is only one world, and one God whose glory is manifested in it everywhere.

The eastern hills on which the sky rests look so strong and peaceful in their white wrappings. "The pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He hath set the world upon them." They are symbols of the Divine strength; when we need encouragement we turn to the revelation of them—"We lift up our eyes unto the hills." To-day is the severity of their outline sharply defined against the sky with the ruggedness of their

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rocky flanks hardly softened by the snow. They again picture to me the severity of the ascetic ideal. We cannot think of life as other than eager and earnest here on the hill-top. There is no possibility of dreaming away the days here—the very grayness of the rocks, the rude vigor of the wind-tossed branches, the sound of the wind in the pines, above all the majesty of the mountains, would reprove us. There is only one ideal of life possible up here, the ideal of the Sermon on the Mount.

When we think of what shape life shall take, what shall be its rule and guide, we turn always to that wonderful discourse which one day was pronounced from a hill-side in Galilee. One likes to make “the composition of place”; to let the imagination work on the data of the Gospel narrative till one gets pretty clearly in one’s mind just what it was that happened. Indeed, that is the only way to read the Gospel with enjoyment; to compose its narrative into a series of pictures as one goes along. And in doing this it is helpful to follow the method of the mediæval artist and compose the place out of the familiar elements of

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one's life. The mediæval artist did not go to the Holy Land for local color, but he quite boldly put any scene he wanted to show us into a familiar Italian setting. He was right; for it is the true method of bringing our Lord into our lives. In my Meditation to-morrow, then, the Sermon on the Mount may perfectly well be set on a gray hillside, where granite rocks push themselves above the shallow soil, and where tall slim cedars stand straight up like appointed sentinels. At the foot of the slope there is the beach of a lake, where the fishers' boats are drawn up, just the familiar row-boats from which we ourselves have often fished; and out beyond them the blue stretches of the lake, with the reflections of the clouds floating in it. And for the crowd? Well, why not take ourselves and our friends? Why not put ourselves in imagination at our Lord's feet, looking up into His face, listening? And as we listen, all our conventional notions of conduct and morality crumble away, and leave us looking straight at this strange ideal of life which our Lord enunciates so calmly. This is one of the things about Him that

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brings us to His feet — the perfect assurance with which He sweeps away so much that humanity had taken for granted — the assurance of God.

We come back from the revelation that He is, with this brief rule of life He has given us. People — Christian people — are always asking for rules of life; well, here is the Divine rule, the Christ's summing up of all His teaching — why not take that? In any case it is brief, and there is small danger of forgetting it: *Be ye therefore perfect*. That is the answer to our questioning — “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” All spiritual ideals of life are compressed into that — *Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect*.

All that had gone before, then, in the Sermon, had been but an elaboration of this precept, a filling in of the notion of perfection. And it is noticeable, in view of much of our modern religious thought, that this is the only ideal of life proposed to us. We have not set before us a number of varying ideals with the opportunity of choice from among them of the ideal that best suits, in our estimate of the circum-

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stances, our case. We are never told to be anything less than perfect. When the rich young ruler turned away from the ideal of perfection which was offered him, our Lord did not stop him and say: "Very well, if you're not quite up to that, there are other ideals which may be acceptable." What did happen was that our Lord was *very sorrowful*; and surely that is comment enough on any man's life and the adequacy of its ideals, that it inspires our Lord with sorrow. No: there is nothing anywhere held before us in the way of "an easy life for spiritually unambitious people." The one ideal is perfection or sanctity.

And what the content of that ideal is the Sermon on the Mount explains. People profess great difficulty in understanding that discourse. In reality, there is nothing very difficult about it. The true difficulty of the Sermon on the Mount lies in the fact that our wills revolt from it. It cuts across our customary morality and way of looking at life, precisely as it cut across those things in the Jew. The modern man has not at all tried to live by the Sermon on the Mount nor does he wish to; and therefore he de-

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clares it either unmeaning or a piece of impossible idealism.

That it is neither results from the fact that it has been lived. Our Lord lived it. The Saints have at least lived near enough to it to show its possibility. Indeed, the life of our Lord is the constant exposition of the meaning of His teaching. He, at least, lived the Sermon on the Mount. He certainly expected His followers to live it. Moreover, when you turn to the lives and writings of His first followers, you find it taken quite seriously as the Christian type of life. Later, no doubt, Christians lapsed back into traditional and customary morality, and so departed from the Divine ideal of life, and soon found it incomprehensible. It remains incomprehensible in this sense, that the average Christian *cannot imagine himself following it*. In any other sense it is surely not incomprehensible. Our Lord's life is perfectly intelligible. We shall be able to live the Sermon on the Mount when we are willing to pay the price.

I am inclined to think it is quite true that the living of it requires the isolation of Christian groups from "the world" in

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the spiritual sense of that word. For Christian living is common living; it is the experience of a Body. Here on this hill-top we are such a group, and so can take the life of our Lord quite seriously as our guide. Naturally, we have great difficulty in the rigid application of it, because we were all brought up under conditions of life where it was not taken at all seriously. But at least we aim at perfection, and we do not shut our eyes to what perfection actually means. That seems to me the prime condition of all spiritual progress—that we cease to deceive ourselves and take our ideals seriously. That would seem a commonplace maxim enough; but, unfortunately, it is only too common to see people professing one standard and living by another, and actually quite unconscious of the fact. Most of this, no doubt, is pure ignorance. Most Christians suppose that they are living by Christian morality, when, in fact, they are quite ignorant of Christian morality, and are living by the customary morality of their time and class.

We try to treat the New Testament seriously as a constant criticism on life. Our

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Meditations are largely concerned with the application of this criticism. Our method of study is to start with the Gospels, to try to understand its precepts, and then to look for the illustration of them in our Lord's life. Then we are in a position to take up the rest of the New Testament and look for the guidance which comes through increasing experience in Christian living. We look to find both the growing application of the principle, and also to see the departure from it which occurs later, or the failure to appreciate its true meaning. We are especially interested in the failure as a personal warning to ourselves. We criticize ourselves constantly as to whether we are letting down the standard in favor of something that is a little easier; whether we are saying to ourselves, "Our Lord could not possibly have meant that we should be so strict as that, it would take us out of all contact with our fellows." Well, there is always the inexorable fact that our Lord no doubt expected us to follow His teaching, whatever the consequences; and that what He meant by the teaching is obvious from what He Himself did.

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It is the ideal of the life which the Religious must keep ever before her: success in conformity to any lower ideal would be failure. The life of union means union with our Lord in all His experiences. Especially do we seek this union of experience in our prayer life. As we have seen, our special vocation as an Order is a vocation to perpetual intercession; but that must not be interpreted to mean that we spend all our time at the prayer-desk before the Tabernacle asking for *things*. Rather, much of our prayer is sacrificial; that is, it is the offering of ourselves to the will of God in union with our Lord. Our desire is to be in Jesus' sacrifice. When we read the description that St. John gives us of the heavenly world, and see that the center of its action is our sacrificed Lord, offering Himself on our behalf, we attempt through the prayer of union to so unite ourselves to that sacrifice that we may be one with our Lord in His perpetual self-offering. This is the supreme point of our life — this presenting of it in sacrificial offering in our Lord.

So it is that the Religious aims to pass

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from the prayer of meditation to the prayer of union. Those who have experience of the passage find it most wonderful in its illuminating and controlling power. I think its power lies largely in this, that in it one succeeds better in getting rid of self than in other prayer. Just the effort to put away all desire save the desire of our Lord; just the concentration of effort on the act of pure love or of pure self-oblation, withdraws us from the clamor of our habitual desires and strips us of our egoism so that we approach our Lord in the utmost simplicity of self-offering. It is a struggle, no doubt, this prayer; it is not easy, nor indeed possible for most of us, for long to hold the soul out to God, just desiring Him; but as in all spiritual practice the eagerness to succeed does bring about a certain approximation to our ideal; and our Lord does not wait for our perfect accomplishment, but gives Himself to us so far as we are able to receive Him. The tentative and halting effort of the beginning is not rejected for its imperfection, but is rewarded according to its purpose. We are like that crowd that assembled on the slope of the moun-

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tain to listen to our Lord. They all saw Him and they all heard Him, but what any one actually *gained* was in proportion to what he brought. That is the meaning of our Lord's reiterated warning: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

We seek also through union with our Lord that wider contact with our brethren which is only possible through our mutual inherence in Him. It is one of our spiritual ambitions to be *active citizens* in the kingdom of God. We are interested in the whole life of that kingdom and not exclusively in the life of any fraction of it. This House set on a hill is by itself a very insignificant thing, and we who live here are very humble members of God's kingdom. But we *are* members; and our House *is* in the kingdom. When to-morrow we sing Mass in our Chapel it will be a very plain and simple action, but in reality it is the same action which is going on in the world of the spirit where the choirs of angels and saints chant about the One Offering forever. These things we know cannot be estimated in human units of importance; our importance comes from the fact that we

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are in Christ. And thus being in Christ we want to realize both the privileges and responsibilities of that fact.

We are "fellow-citizens with the Saints, and of the household of God." That means the whole household everywhere, the entire company of the Saints. We seek ways of making our privilege a real thing. We feel that so often the privileges of life are unused through a kind of deficiency in the imagination. The fact presented to us is so great that we fail to understand its possibility for us, and so neglect it. It is that way too in the ordinary life of men. The resources that the world offers to life are practically limitless; as we watch human activity it seems a mere scramble for what the world offers. Yet relatively few attain anything which seems much worth while after they have attained it; very few attain to the best they might have had; they squander life on life's poorest, when they might have had life's best. That is a danger, too, of really religious people; they fail to discover how rich a harvest of the fruits of the Spirit they might gather. They lack the quality which I can only describe as spirit-

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ual imagination — the quality that is noted as the foundation of Moses' vocation — "He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." That is it — the spiritual penetration, which conceives what *must* be, and so apprehends it as to make it the basis of life.

Our union with our Lord, the King of the mediatorial Kingdom and the source of its life, carries with it of necessity the right of fellowship with all citizens of the kingdom. And that would be a strange kind of fellowship to which should be denied all forms of expression. The very word fellowship carries with it the notion of exercised relations to one another. We are not candidates for the Communion of Saints, we are members of it. And here we take that membership very seriously. It opens to us privileges which we are eager to use. We appreciate to the full what it means to have the intercessions of the Saints open to us. It removes that feeling of isolation which it is so hard to bear — perhaps the hardest to bear of our spiritual experiences. We cannot avoid it at times. There are moments when it seems that we should faint

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and fail under the weight of our vocation; and all the sympathy of our fellows seems very far off and incapable of lending support. And then there comes rushing into our souls the conviction of our membership in the Body, of the treasures of spiritual sympathy which are open to us, of our right to cry to all other members of the Body for the support of their intercessions.

The weariness of life is its isolation. Many a life droops and fades and finally loses all heart because it is unable to stand alone. If such could only find the meaning of their membership in our blessed Lord's Body, that they do not have to stand alone. Around them is the love of God, and that love is manifested in the love of His Saints. We turn to their prayers for our support; and it is not so much that we want them to obtain such and such things for us by their prayers, as it is that we want to feel the support of their prayers. Often in the crises of our lives we know that there is nothing that can be done, but we cling to the expression of love and sympathy which help us to endure to the end. To know that the friend knows and prays is so good

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a thing. And to know that this wider circle of friends know and pray! To feel that we may count on them! To know that when we call on the Blessed Mother or the Saint who is especially dear that there is instant response! These are the spiritual values that we seek to make our own and by them to enrich our lives. From St. Mary of the Hills there constantly goes that intercession which associates all the Saints in its work, and which is strong and confident because it knows that its littleness and weakness is merged in the greatness and power of the kingdom of the Redeemed.

So the life of prayer grows in depth and intensity, and reaches out to ever broader use of the powers of the Body of Christ. Growth in the spiritual life means growth in the life of prayer, increasing comprehension of what are the manifold spiritual activities stored in that one notion, *prayer*. It is wonderful to see lives unfold in understanding of what prayer is, to see the joy of the deepening experience, the steady glow of the soul that has found the meaning of the life of union. When we have found at the center of prayer the passionate

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giving of ourselves to God, desiring only to find ourselves in Him, we have already entered into the joy of the Lord.

And amid whatever vexations and distractions of the exterior life, we have found peace. The spirit is calm whatever may be the beat of the waves upon the life in which it is set. I think we value our hills as the symbol of the peace-giving strength of God. Just now, as I raise my eyes and look out from my tower window, the snow that covers them is rose-flushed in the evening light. All night they will be beautiful in the whiteness of the moon-light; and in the morning they will turn rose again with the coming of the sun. But always they will be strong and peaceful, the symbol of the Divine strength and peace. We look out and take courage. The storms that beat upon them have no power to change them: they endure forever and are forever beautiful, only changing the form of their beauty with the changing seasons of the year. We need be as little affected by the raging of the storms of this world, for we too have entered into the heart of eternity and have found the peace of God. How strong the

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love of God is! How confident we are that the end will be that He will love the world back into union with Himself! What joy it is to us to feel that we are a part of this world-work of our Lord, and that with all the Kingdom of the Elect our lives are offered to Him to be willing instruments of the seeking love of God. Our work, our prayers, our lives, are nothing else but this — the movement of our spirits toward closer union with our Lord. Our aim is to be “always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.”

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